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THE LADY HERBERT'S GENTLEWOMEN.

BY

ELIZA METEYARD,

(“SILVERPEN,”)

AUTHOR OF “MAINSTONE’S HOUSEKEEPER,”

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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THE LADY HERBERT'S GENTLEWOMEN.

CHAPTER I.

CHRISTMAS AT SHIRLOT.

THIS is a very cold December morning, as pretty Selina goes round the cloisters, tapping at the quaint doors, and delivering letters. There are several for Miss Eden, and two for Miss Morfe. Nanny takes these letters in and places them in her mistress's hand; for early as it is, and cold as it is, the brave-hearted and bright little woman is already seated at breakfast. The fire glows—as only fires upon the blessed hearths of Shirlot glow—and studious nicety and the results of good taste enrich the primitive home.

One letter has Amy's superscription, the other shows an unknown hand and far-away postmark.

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True to the deep love which burns in her heart, Miss Morfe opens Amy's first, and when she has read it twice she folds it slowly up, thinking sadly, as it seems, of something that vexes her spirit, rather than of the letter. Then she opens the other wonderingly; something drops from it; the writing within is of the briefest; yet both convey pleasure and unconcealed surprise. She lifts her hands; joy is radiant in her thoughtful face, and her next impulse is to call Nanny. That briskest of little maids hurries forth from the bedroom—for Miss Morfe's home, being in a newer part of the hall, has a bedroom instead of a bed-recess—and listening, wonders too. For some unknown stranger has, it seems, enclosed Miss Morfe a five-pound note, with these few accompanying words: "For the accomplishment of a good wish—a Christmas holiday for Amy at Shirlot." The postmark is that of a remote town in the north of England, and the handwriting commonplace, and wholly unknown.

"To think of it," says Miss Morfe, as she shows her good maid the note and reads the letter; "it seems like Heaven's gift. Not that I like receiving aid in any shape—work and independence are to me more blessed things than charity—but still, as it has thus dropped to my hand, like rich fruit in its good season, I am very grateful. To think of my darling's joy when the money reaches her, and to think that there is enough here to buy her a new frock, and pay her fare back again! Nanny, we must be busy to-day—you shall go to

the hill-farm and order a fine fowl for our Christmas dinner, and I'll send a note by the carrier for the Temeford grocer to send us currants and plums; and you shall go these errands whilst I write to Amy. Darling child, how happy she will be! Yet it puzzles me to think who it is that can have sent the letter. I am sure I have no friends in London who would have thought of such a thing—and none here that could have afforded it—unless it is Mr. Quatford.”

“Well, ma'am, perhaps you guess right. Or if he didn't send it, maybe Mr. Austen did. For when he called in here one evening a week ago, I recollect his asking you if you would be alone this Christmas time; and you sighed and said you feared you should be. He said no more, but perhaps for all that he may have sent the money.”

“Nonsense, Nanny, that is an improbable guess, and you mustn't think such a thing, or speak of such a thing. If Mr. Quatford, with his goodness to me in so many ways, should choose to do it, it is within the bounds of probability, for he does much with his right hand of which his left knows nothing. But that a shy, dreamy man like Mr. Islip should even notice my words, is a thought that would occur to no one.”

“Perhaps not, ma'am. But the chaplain's nephew is not so much a dreamer as you think.” And the good maid, having her own reasons for saying what she does—as Peter has been courting her of late in a sly way—smiles merrily, and

hastens to commence the preparations for Amy's coming.

The post which has thus brought such joy to one of Lady Shirlot's worthiest gentlewomen, takes it also to another room. Lucy Eden and her mother are at breakfast when the letters arrive, and amongst these is one containing money, and another from an old-fashioned bachelor brother, who, employed in a railway terminus at Liverpool, has but scant holidays. Yet he has begged three days this Christmas time, for loving Lucy dearly, and not having seen her for a long time, he wishes to come to Shirlot. Mrs. Eden, who is in a tolerably cheerful mood this morning, and whom the fact that Lucy can pay for the Christmas dinner and this unexpected onslaught on her cupboard, cheers still more, is immediately busy with hospitable thoughts intent.

"I'll go by Mrs. Prudence" (Mrs. Prudence is the carrier) "to Temeford to-morrow, and buy a goose, and order a barrel of ale. But, my dear, the bed puzzles me. How can your brother Tom sleep? Mrs. Price's cannot be thought of, nor can the Claytons' after this disgraceful business. So what we are to do I don't know."

"We can make him a bed on the old sofa in the room where I write; and if there is a good fire he will feel no chill."

"Yes, that'll do—Tom's not particular. But I hope he'll arrive in decent hours, whilst the gates are open. Last time he came tapping at my window at two in the morning—and there he had

to stand till six o'clock, when the gates are opened. But it was summer weather, and it did not matter."

"But it would at this season, with so much snow upon the ground, and so much yet to come."

"Well, my dear, Tom always does odd things." And with this Mrs. Eden hastens to begin her holiday preparations, and Lucy retires to her room, where one of the little mob-capped maids has already lighted the fire and made all bright and cheerful.

In the course of another hour or two the cloisters are in a perfect state of siege, for this and the succeeding day are the date of the great Christmas purification. The hall, the cloisters, the galleries, the children's dormitories, the agent's rooms, the matron's rooms, the great parlour, and the greater kitchen, are rubbed and scrubbed to an astonishing pitch of daintiness. The wooden platters resume their pristine whiteness, the pewter service shines in the great rack like molten silver, and old Harris, bringing in great boughs of holly and mistletoe, hangs them up amidst the sides of bacon and mighty hams.

The rooms of the major part of Lady Herbert's gentlewomen undergo an equal purgation, except in the case of such oddities as Miss Sophia Simpkins, who hates trouble and the expense of black-lead and soap. But even she is somewhat forced to bend to the majesty of unalterable law. As to Mrs. Eden, she is absolutely in her

glory, and the cloister is inundated with all her worldly goods, a few excepted. But the result is perfection in its way.

When all this Christmas preparation is at an end the children's fortnight holiday begins. A few who come from remote distances, or are orphans, remain, but the major part return to their homes. On this intensely cold, snowy morning they go, and those who have attended to Miss Eden's room, or otherwise waited upon her, come in to say good-bye; whilst the lady sits peacefully writing, whilst the great fire glows, and whilst the pretty robin who has so long kept her company chirps on the snowy window-ledge outside. Lucy has a present for each of the little maids, though the best is reserved for Selina, who is the last to come in in her little red cloak, her bonnet hooded in a thick handkerchief, and her bundle on her arm. She is enchanted with her gift—a collar and ribbon from London—and expresses her thanks warmly; yet it is plain to see that she has something to ask, for she hesitates and lingers.

“Well, Selina, what is it you have to say to me? Tell me frankly.”

“If you please, ma'am, you know I leave school next Easter twelvemonth.”

“Yes, Selina—Mrs. Hutchinson told me so.”

“Then, if you please, ma'am, do you think you will want a little maid? If you would, I should like to live with you. A lady from Brockerby Rectory has been over to engage

me for that date, but I would rather live with you, I like you so."

"This is a bright idea, Selina, and I like it exceedingly. Yes, if you will look forward to being good and dutiful to me, I will take you, and be as good a mistress as I can. Hitherto I have lived in furnished rooms, but I mean to take a small house when I return to London, furnish it, and live by myself. So you shall be my little maid if you will."

"Oh, thank you, ma'am," replies Selina, with great and unconcealed joy; "mother and father will be so pleased to hear it, for they've learnt so much about you that they like. I can wash, and iron, and make bread——"

"And are the neatest of little housemaids I ever knew. Mrs. Hutchinson has told me that you seem as though you could do nothing untidily. So, Selina, you shall be my little maid. Come here, and let me take your hand as the seal upon our pleasant compact."

The little maid comes forward, hesitatingly, abashed, but very happy. It is impossible, however, to look upon the earnest, pretty, and childish face and be cold and formal, so Lucy draws it down towards her own, and imprints there her womanly caress. And when Selina turns away the pretty hooded face is wet with tears.

That same evening Lucy lays aside her work for some days, and helps her mother to make preparations for the great pudding—the old gentle-

woman enlivening the time with divers stories of bygone Christmases.

But no Christmas she can tell of has been colder or more snowy than this, for it has now been snowing incessantly for three days, the ground is covered to a great depth, no post has come in for full the same period, and the drifts at the foot of the hills are said to be immensely deep. The road to Temeford is still open, though the village people and the farmers round have had to cut a way through the great drift at the foot of the acclivity below the hall. Of news there is little to talk of. Some of Lady Herbert's gentlewomen are gone, or are going on the morrow, others will have friends at home, others keep Christmas in solitude; the four children who have remained at school are very happy in the great warm kitchen, whilst they watch Tibb making pork-pies, after a renowned fashion of her own; and Mrs. Hutchinson keeps her parlour, being much of an invalid. She can write letters, keep the accounts, receive visitors for a few hours through the day, but this is all—so weak and prostrate has she become since the time of the great sorrows which were hers. As to the school, a young woman from a neighbouring village has lately attended to it; but as she is not competent for the task as a continuance, a new mistress will have to be sought when Christmas festivals are over—and “at no remote date a new matron also,” thinks Mrs. Hutchinson, though she tells no one what her thoughts are. “Yet I shall

cleave to Shirlot unto the end—even unto the end,” she whispers to herself.

Though it snows all night, and the next morning is snowy too, and all sorts of impossible stories are afloat as to the condition of the roads, brother Tom arrives by noon, quick of foot and cheery of manner as he always is. A friendly farmer has brought him part of the way by gig—the rest he has walked—and he describes, wonderingly, the great snow-drifts, especially that at the foot of the acclivity just below Shirlot. He is delighted to see Lucy—he has much to tell her—but there is no time for talk just now, for he steps in just as the great giblet pie is being fabricated; so he fills his pipe, draws his mother’s easy chair closer to the fire, and chats whilst these culinary duties proceed.

The fine pie baked, the other dainties ready, the barrel of ale broached, dinner begins; and after it, whilst Mrs. Eden’s woman clears away, Tom and Lucy pay Christmas visits to several of the old gentlewomen. Miss Hazlehurst is keeping peaceful festival with a niece who arrived the previous day, bedridden Mrs. Thelwall has a sister with her, and Mrs. Quince is miserable, for her daughter is there “setting her to rights,” a terrible infliction, which agrees ill with the old gentlewoman just at this festive season. Two only of Lady Herbert’s gentlewomen keep holiday in solemn solitude—the one from parsimony, the other from a conviction that all joy is sinful; so Miss Simpkins talks with her parrot and sips “little drops,”

and Miss Thorne dines in rigid state, and after it composes herself to read the Thirty-Fifth Chapter of a Treatise on "Spiritual Flagellation."

As they descend the stairs from Miss Hazlehurst's, Tom and Lucy encounter Tibb, and they are forthwith invited into the great kitchen, where there glows a huge fire, and where preparations are being made for spending the Christmas Eve merrily. Mrs. Hutchinson has sent out wine and fruit, Tibb has elaborated a first-rate cake, and amongst those invited are some children from the village, old Harris and his wife, and a few of Tibb's and the maid's relations.

"But the trouble, Miss, is," says Tibb, dropping a curtsey, "that the children are all plaguing me to tell them a story. I'm a poor teller of them—though I know so many—so I humbly take the liberty to ask you, would you tell one for me, if I went over the particulars as belong to it?"

"I couldn't write now, Tibb; I've put by pen and ink for several days."

"Ah, dear! It needn't be wrote, Miss. If I tell it you in my way, you'll tell it in your own—beautifully, I know."

"You give me credit, Tibb, for greater cleverness than I possess."

"Nay, nay, Miss. Thou can'st do anything."

"But I'm so busy, Tibb—I've the pudding to make, and—"

"That's soon made, ma'am. And the children wouldn't want to be told the story till nine o'clock or so, when the games are over."

"I'll see, then, Tibb. But you must step to Mrs. Eden's room and tell me the particulars whilst we sit at tea. Mr. Eden and myself return there presently, after a call upon Miss Morfe. In half-an-hour's time, say, I'll be ready."

"Gratefully thanking you, ma'am, I'll step in. I'll tell you all I have to tell in a quarter of an hour."

When Tom and Lucy reach Miss Morfe's, they find that Amy has not yet arrived. The good aunt and Nanny are expectant—though not anxious—for the kindly neighbour who again drives Amy home has said that it may be eight or nine o'clock before he reaches Shirlot; for the condition of the roads allows but slow travelling. The friends then pleasantly chat—for brother Tom is an old acquaintance of Miss Morfe's—whilst by-and-bye Tibb's request is spoken of.

"Well, if Amy is home in time, and not too tired, I'll come with her and Nanny to the kitchen to hear it; and if after that you and your mother and brother will return and sup with us, I shall be delighted."

"But we shall trespass?"

"Not in the least. My garner is full—so pray come."

Lucy and Tom acquiesce. When they return home, and whilst tea is in progress, Tibb steps in; and, in the promised quarter of an hour, conveys to Lucy all the groundwork of the story she has to tell. This done, the good old servant hurries away to her own little festival, whilst Lucy

hastens to complete the fabrication of the great pudding. But lo! in the worry of the day, the eggs have been forgotten—and as the woman has gone home, and the pudding cannot be fabricated without them, Tom and Lucy set forth on the search for some—though the night is truly Siberian. But the brilliant moonlight converts the night into day, and shines with inexpressible beauty on the great waste of snow around. To the village and to farm-house doors they go—their appearance in some cases creating quite a wonder—but nobody has any eggs to spare, for everybody is going to have a pudding. Yet the walk and what they see would make up for much greater disappointment: such pleasant homes, such pretty rustic festivals, such jugs of home-brewed ale, such crab-apples dancing on the top, such steaming puddings and pies and roasts; such gossip, such merry children, such cheerful old men and aged dames—these, with the deep snow outside, and the wild-wooded, hilly, solitary country around, make together a rich picture. In most cases they are hospitably asked in—in some to taste the cheer. At last, after wandering through the deep snow of a primitive little orchard, whose russet tints and crystal rivulet Lucy has in autumn days stayed many times to see, they reach a small farm-house, and are admitted into a kitchen, where a wood fire roars up a chimney centuries old. A little newborn baby, its newly-risen mother, and the father and grand-parents are gathered round—and being

invited to the fire, the baby is admired, the eggs are obtained, and spiced elderberry wine is poured out hot in glasses, against the taking of which no negative will be listened to. "Come, taste it, miss—come, taste it, master? Christmas comes but once a year. The Lord love us all!"

As soon as they return home, Lucy finishes off the pudding—during which brother Tom and Lady Herbert's gentlewoman chat by the fire. Whilst this is the scene Lucy's quick ear detects the sound of distant wheels.

"Dear old Tom," she says, as she approaches the bachelor, and pats his head with her floury finger, "just go out and see if that is Amy; I'm anxious about her, for it is time she should be home."

Tom loves Lucy so that he would cross the wide world to serve her lightest wish; so forth he runs hatless, but soon returns.

"Yes—the fairest, prettiest young girl one might see through a summer's day has just come in the care of an old farmer, who was as tender with her as a mother with her babe. Now Miss Morfe is kissing her and leading her tenderly in, whilst the maid carries a box and lantern. But, Lucy, is there a lover in the case?"

"Nonsense, Tom—Amy Morfe the younger is but a child."

"Well! she's pretty enough, and old enough to win a heart. Be this as it may—I reached the outer gates before the gig, and there, walking up and down, muffled up and smoking a cigar,

was a grave, handsome-looking young man. He was evidently seen by the little maid, for she nodded to him, though the old farmer seemed too busy in staying his gig to notice the affair. The gentleman kept out of sight—though following the little maid at a distance till her aunt's door was closed. I can tell you no more; for here ends my romance."

"Nor can I explain it, Tom. Amy Morfe has not been here since I came. The only cigar smoker that I know of in the village is the chaplain's nephew; and he's too grave and taciturn to be one to fall in love. But, come, let us prepare to go, or the children will be waiting."

The neatest and quickest of little women in all she does, Lucy is soon ready, and her mother being already in full costume, they lock the door and go.

The hall kitchen, resplendent with its shining pewter, is half full of guests; for Miss Hazlehurst and her niece, Mrs. Boston, and others of Lady Herbert's gentlewomen, hearing that a tale is to be told, have stepped in—and Tibb and the children are expectant. Miss Morfe and Amy would, however, be waited for, but that Nanny comes with a message to say that her young mistress is too tired to attend—though that in an hour hence Miss Morfe will expect Mrs., Miss, and Mr. Eden to supper, as well as Miss Hazlehurst and her niece. As this is the case, Lucy takes her seat by the fire, and tells the story

which Tibb's sister brought far away out of Lincolnshire awhile before.

* * * * *

When the tale is told Miss Eden is gratefully thanked by all assembled, whilst old Tibb and the four little maids rise and make the most reverential of curtsies. Listening to the story has been a great treat to them—better than blind man's buff or forfeits.

"I'm sure, ma'am," says Tibb, "we're all mightily obleeged to you. Sister Susan would ha' wondered how thou could'st ha' caught the heart o' th' story as thou didst."

"Ay, ay!" joins in old Harris; "if one could get a story such as this on winter nights, they wouldn't be the warisome things they be to them as canna read, or them as has no heart for books. Warisome things be winter nights to many a man and woman about Shirlot."

But it is time for the gentlewomen to retire to their own bright hearths; so they bid each other a most friendly good night, and depart when they have severally stepped into the matron's parlour, and offered words of sympathy and regard to the invalid. She lies reading by her pleasant fire, and speaks cheerfully of being better in a little while.

Crossing through the snow to the opposite cloister, Miss Hazlehurst and her niece, with Lucy, her mother, and brother, became instantly aware of the strong smell of cigar smoke floating up and down. Indeed, they have the sense that

the smoker passes from the cloister as they enter it; but as Nanny at the instant opens the door to see if the guests are coming, all comment or question is prevented.

The supper is ready, and Miss Morfe receives her friends with her usual warmth and kindness. Young Amy, now warmed and rested, looks lovely and wondrously happy. There is much to tell of her long journey, of the deep snow which covers England; and thus, amidst chatting, feasting, and old-fashioned health drinking, the Christmas Eve passes by on one of the many hearths of Shirlot.

CHAPTER II.

ANNA MACKINTOSH.

CHRISTMAS-DAY has passed, and the next day almost, for it is fast growing dark, as a one-horse fly takes its way out of Temeford. It has a stout horse, and a stout driver—for both are needful on such roads; and the passenger is a young woman, tall in stature, and of singularly grave demeanour. You would say in an instant, by her looks, that she had been born north of the Tweed—for her clear gray eyes are full of intelligence, and her manner betokens an innate power of controlling others. Education may have enlarged the one, practical rule the other; but whether this is so or not, her peculiarity of look and manner—self-reliant and sedate as both are—would attract the observation of even an ordinary spectator.

She has come far away from the north-west of Ireland, at this cold season; has journeyed from Liverpool to Temeford this very day, and, an entire stranger to this country, is passing on to a

village about three miles beyond Shirlot, where she hopes to meet with a temporary home in the cottage of a person to whose relatives she has shown many courtesies. Beyond a letter sent the month before, to say she should probably travel hither, no arrangement has been made for her coming, so that she is a perfect stranger in the land—unexpected and unknown.

For a time the vehicle progresses steadily; but as the evening grows darker, and the road becomes less beaten by traffic, the mile-stones are passed slower and slower. As the hills are neared, the snow becomes still deeper, so that the man has to carry a lantern and lead his horse. Eight—nine—ten o'clock—and Shirlot not even gained! The man wishes he had never undertaken such a journey in such weather. It is now eleven o'clock—and the poor horse, after plunging up to its girths through a fresh drift, becomes utterly knocked up; so that all the driver can do is to lead it forward to the gate of a large farm-house just to be caught sight of in the distance, and the first seen for several miles. Indeed, had there been inn or dwelling within reach, shelter would have been sought long ago; but this part of the country, between Shirlot and Temeford, is solitary in the extreme.

The driver knocks at the door of some out-buildings which lie near the road—and after awhile a man opens a casement and thrusts out his head.

“No! it's no use going to th' house, the missis

wouldn't let in her own son i' th' dead o' night, much less a stranger. No! she's a churl—thou mun ask nought on. But I can gi'e thee and thy horse shelter i' th' stable for a few hours—and thee can put the fly under th' shed."

"Thank ye—that's kind enough—but I've a lady with me."

"Ay! I can say nought to that; for the missis'd be like a mad dog if I knocked her up. But up the hill—two miles away—is Shirlot; and at th' hall there'd be found many a good old soul who'd give th' lady shelter."

"But I fear I couldna leave the horse to show the lady; and—"

"If the road is straight I can find the place myself," interrupts the lady with decision. "You're very tired, driver, and I'm accustomed to difficulties. Is the road straight?—that is all you have to tell me."

"Ay, missis—ay, missis," says the man at the casement, "straight enough sure-ly. There be a lane to th' right thou mustna turn up—and there be a mighty drift that thee mustna get tangled in. Else the way be straight and sure enough."

"Thank you; I'll take the lantern and go forward. When you have rested, driver, and day has come, you can follow me. But what is this hall?—a gentleman's seat, or what?"

"No, missis," replies the farm-servant; "it be a place where old gentlefolks be housed. Old women as has come down i' th' world—through no fault o' theirs. There be a good lot on 'em—nigh

thirty, I think—and they all be as well off as robins in a corn-stack.”

“Thank you.”

And the young woman, hesitating no longer, takes the lantern and goes onward; for hers is not a nature to hesitate—either as to a road or a duty. But the depth of the snow baffles her a good deal, and even by the aid of the lantern the way can be but imperfectly seen. When she reaches it, she does mistake and turns into the lane or by-road; and it is not till she has gone a considerable distance that she finds she is wrong—both by the lane itself narrowing, and by the cessation of wheel-ruts or other signs of traffic. She has thus to retrace her steps, cold and fatigued as she already is. The highway regained, she soon finds that she is right by the presence of the enormous snow-drift—which, eighteen or twenty feet in depth, fills the rocky pass or acclivity which leads up to Shirlot. The farmers and cottagers round have cut a way through it, yet it is sufficiently formidable to traverse in the dead of a winter's night. Still, the brave woman passes through its shadows—gains the highway beyond—and is soon before the white gate leading to the hall. This outer gate is never locked, so that she passes through and knocks at the lodge door. But knock as she will, she can make no one hear; for it occasionally happens that old Harris goes to see his wife—who lives a mile or two away—and thus he is probably absent. Failing here, the benumbed and sorely fatigued stranger ascends the avenue, only to find its ex-

tremity shut in by massive iron gates and palisading; whilst, spent as she is, the little she can see by so feeble a light enchants her. The large sweep of snow-covered lawn, the peaceful cloisters, the galleries above, and the hall, with its massive steps leading thereto, form together a picture of peace, rest, and opulent retirement striking to even her, who has seen so many places of the kind.

"There must be some side entrance to so large a building," she thinks to herself, as she begins to be more sensible than ever of great fatigue and growing numbness, "and I must try and find it—or I shall die in such cold."

With this she returns to the highway, passes along it, turns up a short lane past a farm-house, and finds she is right. One of the sides of Shirlot is towards her; but there is a field and barn to pass, and lastly a wicket and a garden path. But when these are by she finds the great nail-studded door of entrance locked; whilst knock as she will thereon, she can make no one hear.

Going next a little distance from the building, she looks up and down its many casements in despair, for all is dark and still; but presently, through one of the lower casements, she fancies she sees a glimmer of fire-light. She approaches it; her surmise is correct—a dull fire burns in the room, though blind and shutter prevent any view therein. She knocks again and again. Some grumbling within is the result, followed by the opening of the shutter, the drawing up of the blind, and the presentment of a sour and aged face.

"What do you want? Who are you? Why do you disturb honest people at this hour?"

"Excuse me; I am a stranger, but no vagabond. I set out from Temeford by a fly the past afternoon, but the state of the roads has been such that the driver has had the greatest difficulty to proceed. At last he has been forced to stay at a farm some two miles below here. I have come onwards, and I crave your goodness to let me rest and warm myself a little."

"Rest yourself!—warm yourself!—do you know that it is only between two and three o'clock in the morning, and that unknown people are never harboured at Shirlot? Couldn't you have stayed at the farm-house?—or cannot you go on to the village?"

"To the farm-house they told me there was no admittance; to the village I am too spent to go. In pity sake, let me have a few hours' shelter. I will pay for it. My name is Mackintosh—Anna Mackintosh. I am a native of Sutherlandshire, and till within the past month have been matron to a large hospital in the north-west of Ireland; but I had to leave on account of ill-health, arising from the humidity of the climate. I have letters here that will convince you, if my simple word will not."

Mrs. Eden begins again to grumble, but a young voice interposes, and a young face shows itself at the casement.

"We will give you shelter, and rouse up the fire this instant. Be good enough to knock at

the next window to the left—I have a brother sleeping in the room, who will rise at once and get the key from the hall to let you through the side door. Do not hesitate—brother Tom has the kindest and most willing spirit in the world.”

Whilst the stranger obeys, Lucy, amidst much grumbling from her mother, hastily dresses herself, rouses up the fire—which in winter time is never wholly let out—puts on the kettle, and spreads the cloth for breakfast. She then opens the room door into the cloister, to find Tibb already rung up, and the stranger admitted.

“I hope, Tibb,” she says, as she lingers for a minute behind her brother and the stranger, “that Mrs. Hutchinson is not alarmed by ringing the bell at so early an hour.”

“Well, a bit so, for she feared one of the ladies was ill; and, you see, being herself so low and weak, she’s nervous; beside, ever since that last bad business of her son, she thinks that everything unusual is a plot of his. You’re to be sure and find that the person’s tale is real, and if it be so, she’ll be welcome to the teacher’s bed and a few days’ rest and food, if so she will.”

“My love to Mrs. Hutchinson, and say that I will see that she is not deceived. As far as the stranger’s appearance goes, it is quite in her favour.”

When Lucy enters the room she sees that brother Tom has attended to the fire, till it is a mass of light and heat, that coffee is made, and that the stranger is seated in Mrs. Eden’s chair. The

old lady is now more complaisant ; she invites her guest within the bed recess to change her boots and stockings, and otherwise refresh herself. When she returns to the hearth a capital breakfast is ready, but of this the poor guest can take but little. Her chief enjoyment is the bright fire, for she is benumbed and stiff, and very weary. By nature she seems to be both reticent and cautious, but the good faith in which she has been received, both by Lucy and her brother, necessitates her, as it were, to lessen both for a time ; and she tells them, as far as weariness permits, much relating to her residence in Ireland, and the heavy responsibilities which were hers. She puts letters and testimonials into Lucy's hands, that at once set at rest all question of respectability and position.

"It is most providential," she adds just now, when her numbness is less and the coffee has cheered her drooping spirits, "that you took me in, for I could go no further. I must have sunk beneath your window—for torpor and weariness had quite overmastered me. In a few hours I hope to be able to proceed, but I shall always remember your active charity, as bearing out the uncommon pleasure I had in my first glimpse of Shirilot, though seen under the shadow of a winter's night."

"It is a blessed place," says Lucy ; "and none should approach it in other spirit than you describe. It is fortunate that our fire was in, and ourselves inclined to stir—for brother Tom leaves

us this morning early, on his way back to Liverpool, and therefore it was our intention to have breakfast long before daybreak. A neighbouring farmer is going to drive him to Temeford, and as he passes by he can inquire after the fly and your luggage."

"Thank you; I paid the driver before I left him, so that if he likes to send the luggage on by some honest hand, he can."

Lucy herself goes presently to the hall, and ascending to Mrs. Hutchinson's chamber, makes her satisfied that the stranger's history is genuine, and herself no common person. Upon this Tibb has immediate orders to make the teacher's bed and chamber ready, so that in less than an hour Miss Mackintosh rests therein; and not long after cheery brother Tom is again on his way to hard work and bachelor solitude.

CHAPTER III.

THE PAY-DAY—THE DINNER-DAY—AND
A PROMISE.

FOUR times in each year Lady Herbert's gentlewomen receive their stipends. It is at those dates subservient to the old style, so that they fall a little later than the ordinary quarter-days. Nevertheless, pay-day is a great day at Shirlot. Needy gentlewomen—who forestal their incomes—reckon of it eagerly; and those who are miserly reckon of it in a like manner, for it adds to the glittering hoards they so fondly prize. Creditors know the day accurately; though the majority of these good old gentlewomen neither have debt nor receive bill, sorrow has taught them her wise and austere lessons.

The pay-days of Christmas and Midsummer are the most important; for the majority of payments are then greatly larger in amount—and a dinner follows at the distance of a day or two. On these

occasions Lady Herbert's gentlewomen meet, except such as are incapacitated by infirmity or illness. Their wardrobes give forth their choicest treasures, and smiles and courtesies are as prevalent as flowers in season.

This is a cold January day, when Tibb and her little handmaids set the great parlour in holiday order. A carpet is laid down, a large fire glows in the grate, and the quaint-shaped tables and chairs reflect its brightness a hundred-fold. Far away—in the wing of the left cloister, and up a small staircase similar to that of Miss Thorne, in the wing opposite—a double-bedded chamber, never used but on these occasions, is prepared; for the agent and his secretary are expected, and here they sleep.

As evening closes in, the dog-cart drives up to the lodge; and two gentlemen, alighting, leave the vehicle to the care of their man-servant, and adjourn to the hall. Here, after tea has been served, Mrs. Hutchinson—as is her custom—carries in her accounts. She is still weak and ill; and the change which has come over her is so great as to be observed by any one—a stranger especially.

The agent does not notice it, however, for a time—till the business of the evening is over—till accounts are verified and payments made; but then he says kindly, as he turns his chair a little round towards the fire—for the matron is a very old and respected servant,

“I am sorry to see you looking so depressed

and ill, Mrs. Hutchinson. You must have a little change—we must see to give you a holiday.”

“Thank you, sir, I need none. I love being at Shirlot better than anywhere. My days, I think, are not many; and where can they be so well closed as in the old place of duty? Sorrows of the mind are worse than those of the body; and they show it—by wearing us away more quickly.”

“Well—you must not let yours prey upon you too much. As I wrote to you at the time, you must cast some of yours aside—and have utterly done with your worthless son.”

“I have,” she repeats emphatically; “I have. I have shown it already, by refusing to take in any letters from his hand.”

“You’re justified in so doing. As to the rest of the matter, I spoke to the Trustees respecting the loss of the sixty pounds; and they hold that, as the money was in your custody, you must make it good—absolutely. But—considering your long services and irreproachable life—they are willing to raise the sum of twenty pounds amongst themselves, and—”

“I shall not need it, sir,” she interrupts, with great firmness, “though at the same time thanking the gentlemen for their generous offer. I could not, for countless reasons, accept it; and none greater than the one, that the sin of the child should be redeemed if possible by the parent. Here, sir, is the money.” (The matron takes an envelope from her pocket, and from it bank-notes, which she lays before the gentleman.) “To

procure it I have sold a little cottage which I bought four years ago. The Temeford debts absorb the rest, and leave me comparatively a beggar. Yet even now—there is a trouble—that—”

She can say no more, her utterance is so wholly choked.

“The girl, you mean?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Nothing has been heard of her since we ascertained that she was at work somewhere in Cheshire, and thus set at rest the question of her actual existence.”

“Nothing further, sir?”

“No. It was well for this man, Clayton, that we ascertained thus much, or it would have been worse for him.”

“Well, sir, he’s punished enough already, if all accounts be true. A slattern and a shrew, this wife of his makes their common home a hell. Not a day passes but what there are bitter quarrels between her and old Mrs. Clayton; so bitter, indeed, as to be a war not only of words—but deeds. They threaten each other in the vilest terms—and swear severally the one to oust the other. Whilst young Clayton, in order to escape, is always off somewhere or other drinking, and never slinking home till darkness hides his face; for it seems he is ashamed to meet or see anybody. So what with his intemperance, and his wife’s extravagance in dress, the little money she brought is nearly run out.”

“Well, he’d better meet his rent, that’s all,”

replies the agent, sternly. "I shall have no inclination to be merciful to a scoundrel, such as he has shown himself to be."

"But if he is bad, sir, his old mother is still worse. He'd have married poor Rhoda if he had had his own will; for it was only yesterday he told old Harris he loved her better than his life, and that he was drunk when his mother forced him to take the woman who is his wife. But as we sow, we reap. If all reports be true, the old mother rues the hour she brought such a tyrant and slattern into her house; though she is too stern and self-restrained to say as much. As to poor Rhoda, my heart yearns more and more after the girl. If it had not been for the walk I sent her across the hills, this woe would have never happened; for, if left to herself, one more innocent and good there could not be. I look upon myself as her slayer—I do, indeed!"

"Scarcely so; this is too harsh a view to take of the matter. Further inquiries shall be made; and if we can find her, and there should be a child in the case, the father shall, at least, be made to support it." And the gentleman, in order to dissipate the matron's grief, who is weeping bitterly, changes the subject, and talks about the school.

To his surprise, as her emotion becomes stilled, Mrs. Hutchinson tells him about Miss Mackintosh's advent—how she yet stays at the hall, and how kindly an assistant and friend she has shown herself to be.

"As she has at present no engagement, and the bracing air of the hills seems to agree with her," continues the matron, "she is willing to stay and take the teacher's place for a time. Should she leave eventually, she has a younger sister capable of filling it. I have written to several of her references, and find her antecedents excellent. All the correspondents speak of her as a powerful-minded woman, to whom command seems natural. I have discovered this myself. Miss Simpkins was, as usual, inclined to be obstreperous about her room being cleaned; but I sent Miss Mackintosh, and at a word from her Miss Sophia was as obedient as a child. She is also a good doctress, as her management of one of the girls two nights ago plainly showed."

"May I see her?"

"Certainly."

Miss Mackintosh is summoned, and her appearance and intelligence more than fulfil the expectation raised. After some little conversation, it is arranged that she shall remain at Shirlot for such time as may be mutually agreeable, and that her duty shall be to generally assist the matron, as well as attend to the school. She and Mrs. Hutchinson then retire.

On the morrow, the tenants on the wide estate of Shirlot come to pay their rent. But the morning wanes, and the early afternoon comes, without young Clayton having appeared. Just, however, as the accounts are being closed, his newly-made, tawdry-dressed wife enters the room.

"I have brought you part of the rent," she says in her uncourteous fashion, "and Mr. Clayton will send the rest when he can."

"Why does not Mr. Clayton come with this message himself? He knows very well that such a method of payment is not allowable."

"He isn't well. For the rest, mother-in-law won't pay her share."

"The Trustees of Lady Herbert's Charity have nothing to do with family quarrels. What remains of the money must be paid within a week of this time. I shall give no grace—his conduct has already been intolerably bad."

"I've nothing to do with that."

"You have. You were teacher here, and knew the miserable child he wronged. A woman with a spark of honour or feeling would have led him to make that child his wife, instead of taking him herself. Such an act is most disgraceful. Pray leave the room."

Not a whit abashed, Mrs. Clayton bangs the door after her and goes.

The tenants' dinner follows; the morrow noon is spent in inspecting land and farm buildings, and giving orders to the blacksmith, the carpenter, and others—and the evening is to be devoted to the payment of such golden pounds as will make seven-and-twenty gentlewomen happy.

With the exception of Shirlot's self-elected aristocracy, Miss Thorne and Miss Pockle, the gentlewomen at all times drink tea early enough;

but on pay-days the hour is still earlier. By four o'clock tea is over; by five o'clock each old lady who can personally attend sits in cap or bonnet ready for the expected summons.

Mrs. Eden is thus seated with her daughter by the fire, when a knock comes on the door, and a little voice says, "If you please, ma'am, you're to come."

The little messenger runs off, and repeats the same knock and the same words at Miss Thorne's door. That lady, in elaborate cap, takes up her gold-headed cane, and, preceded by her maid bearing a lantern, slowly obeys her summons.

Along the cloister, through the great kitchen and passages she goes, and encounters Mrs. Eden at the parlour door. Now, as confluent streams, when they suddenly mingle, become vexed and turgid, so do these gentlewomen, when thus they meet, grow troubled as to precedence. Miss Thorne pushes, and Mrs. Eden pushes—and both ladies stand before the agent together.

"Sir," says Miss Thorne, "I have priority at Shirlot."

"I know it, madam; but I sent for Mrs. Eden first."

"Sir! recollect I am a gentlewoman!"

"There are other gentlewomen at Shirlot besides yourself, Miss Thorne. Mrs. Eden is the wife of a physician, and the mother of a counsellor. Stand aside, if you please, and let me pay this lady first."

Meekly Miss Thorne obeys the command—for

are we not bidden to bear the rebuffs of the proud and insolent? Mrs. Eden paid, she carries with her her old neighbour Mrs. Miles's money, that old lady being too decrepit to attend. When this duty is performed she returns to her daughter to tell her tale, and to meditate, whilst Lucy sits quietly reading, whether she shall sew up her gold in her great pincushion, or venture, bitter as the weather is, to Temeford on the morrow, and put it in the Savings' Bank. "If it goes there," she cogitates, "Lucy cannot make a pretext of borrowing of me;" and this consideration settles the question.

As to Miss Thorne, she goes home with a cheerless heart, to dine, to go through the dessert and port wine mummary—to pray, but not to be thankful. Always in debt, her needs are many, the pittance small—why should she rejoice?

The day of dining has come, and great are the preparations of Lady Herbert's gentlewomen. Lucy comes in from her quaint study about two o'clock, to superintend her mother's toilet, which is already considerably advanced. The great shadows of one of the old lady's morbid fits are already settling down upon her, so that she is very irritable. She looks blue with cold, and Lucy wonders, for she is dressing before as fine a fire as any in all Shirlot. Her hair is all awry—so Lucy has to arrange that—to settle the elaborate cap, to pin the lace collar when the rich satin gown is on, to fix sleeves and mitts, and so forth, and this with jostles and jerks, and "there, that'll do," flying

thick and fast like sharp needles. At last, when all is done, and she looks wonderful in her aged comeliness, she—graceless and thankless—snatches up her pocket-handkerchief and goes; leaving to tears her to whom she is so little of a mother. In a moment or two, however, she returns and opens the door.

“Lucy! the old women will be sure to be asking after a story, so please look one up, and come in and read it, if you’re sent for.”

“Very well, mamma.”

So the old lady goes; and Lucy, only too glad to be alone, clears away all signs of the toilet; and gathering her books sits down to enjoy a quiet evening.

By three o’clock, Lady Herbert’s gentlewomen are assembled in the great parlour. The self-elected aristocracy bow most stiffly to Mrs. Eden, for the one represents her niece, whose call Miss Eden has never returned—a call made in the most elaborate of Cheltenham bonnets—and the other has the incident of the overnight rankling in her heart. But Miss Morfe and Miss Hazlehurst have enough of cheeriness and goodness in themselves to neutralize a much larger amount of petty spite and bitterness. Mrs. Quince is very talkative, and bemoans her daughter’s last “setting to rights” as a thing that nearly brought her to the grave; the two gentlewomen who own dogs have melancholy tales of canine indisposition; and Miss Simpkins—ever ready with some choice piece of scandal

—drops it like henbane into the ears of those who listen.

Dinner is served :—first course, fish ; second course, poultry and joints ; third course, plum-pudding and sweets. Mrs. Hutchinson, though depressed and weak, heads the table—Miss Mackintosh takes the bottom. Amongst themselves the old gentlewomen have had much gossip as to the advent of the stranger, and her installation into office. Miss Pockle has declared it to be “quite preposterous ;” Mrs. Smith “that it’s quite a shame ;” and Miss Simpkins has gone as far as to call her “a Scotch baggage.” But the stranger, serene and unmoved—and unexceptionably polite to all—is proof against sarcasm and malice. Easy and self-possessed, grave and reticent, the good-natured feel at home with her, and the ill-natured are held in respectful awe. One and all feel that, though Miss Mackintosh is but nominally a school-mistress, she is individually and intrinsically much more.

With the exception of a few contingencies, the dinner passes off excellently. Mrs. Eden won’t be helped to apple sauce by Miss Thorne, or Miss Pockle take gravy from Mrs. Eden’s boat. Mrs. Quince thinks the dinner badly cooked ; Miss Simpkins means to tell her friend Mrs. Miles that “the goose was as tough as an old shoe ;” whilst Mrs. Eden treasures up the fact, in order to whisper it to her daughter, that “Mrs. Hutchinson only helped her to a drumstick.” Miss Thorne also makes a great display of the table-napkin she

has brought with her, and hints that she "never relishes her dinner with a steel fork."

The interval between dinner and tea is made as short as possible, for two-thirds of the old ladies doze in their chairs, till the odour of the souchong is before them. This tasted, their tongues wag as though inspired with new life and vigour.

Just as Tibb clears away, Miss Simpkins is in full relation of a long story about the Claytons.

"The old woman and the young wife had a terrible fight yesterday. Yes—and the young woman had the best of it. She declares she'll turn her and her daughters out, bag and baggage, one of these next mornings; whilst the old mistress says she wishes she had hanged herself, rather than have allowed such an idle, foul-tongued slattern to enter her doors."

"Miss Simpkins," interposes Mrs. Hutchinson in her gentle way, "this is a subject which, as you must be aware, is very painful to me. Please drop it. Instead of scandal, the listening to which can do no good, we will have a story. Mrs. Eden tells me that her daughter has promised to come and read us one, if we wish it. I will therefore, with your leave, ladies, send for Miss Eden. When the tale is done, Miss Mackintosh will—if we accompany her to the hall—give us some music, as she plays admirably on the organ."

Thus speaking, the matron sends for Lucy; who presently comes in, in her usual quiet, unobtrusive manner. For a moment the mother's heart feels pride, as a murmur of love and admiration passes

so many aged lips. But the joy is evanescent—and soon the dark shadows are again settled on her soul. At war she must be with some one; at war she must be with the being to whom she gave life; and to this it is coming.

So Lucy, saying she wrote the story a while before, reads

THE CHRISTMAS LETTER.

A kettle sings upon the glistening hob; the fire, though small, burns very bright; the wind blows cold and wild about the solitary house.

In this fair-sized old-fashioned parlour, with its quaint spider-legged furniture, its faded carpet, its scrupulous neatness, are two elderly gentlewomen: one is an invalid, for she lies, covered up with shawls, upon the spider-legged sofa; the other sits beside a small round table, on which burns the very thinnest and bluest of dip-candles. This latter has been reading a newspaper to the invalid; but the listener having fallen into a doze, she had ceased now for some minutes, and sits gazing abstractedly upon the cheerful blaze. In the look is suffering—it gives expression to some hidden cause of great perplexity.

As this is thought over, the look deepens into one of agony. But the sleeper awakening—as a rustling of the pillow, a low cough, a moving of the head show—it is in an instant changed into

an assumed look of cheerfulness, that proves an habitual and extraordinary power of self-command. In another instant the care-worn lady is kneeling beside the pillow, her spare hands pressing the shadowy ones of the invalid.

"I have been asleep, Margaret," says the latter, "and now feel better than I have done for days. Only think, dear, I have been dreaming of that Ann who once lived with us."

"What! that girl that robbed us of all our ready money, and so many other things, when we first came here?"

"Yes—I dreamt she was kneeling here before us, and asking to be forgiven."

"Well, Nelly, that she has been, long ago. You and I, I think, have not proved that we nurse up the memory of wrongs. But come, dear, the clock has gone nine, and you must have your supper."

"Stay, you haven't heard all. After we had forgiven her, I dreamt that she sent us five pounds of the stolen money in a letter."

"I wish she would," adds Margaret with a sigh, "it would be most acceptable this Christmas time. But come, a dream must not lead me to forget you." Thus saying, she takes the candle, goes forth into a very large adjacent kitchen, in which the fire, for thrift, has long died out, sets neatly on a tray the materials of a very frugal supper—some bread and a glass of milk for herself; some beef-tea, which has been stewing in a jar in the oven, for the invalid. This

last she warms, as she now comes back into the parlour, and gives it to Eleanor, with sippets of toasted bread. Supper thus over, and the invalid still more revived, she clears away, and comes back to her post beside the spider-legged sofa.

"Dear Nelly, as you are stronger to-night, I have something to tell you. I do this most reluctantly, as it will give you pain. Indeed, I would conceal it longer, but that I need your concurrence in a step I fear I must take. Dear Nell, the last penny went to-day."

"I half-suspected it, Margaret," weeps the invalid, "though for my sake you have been hiding all with such a cheerful countenance. But what can be done? Cannot we manage till the quarter's income be due, or we get paid for the last needle-work we sent away?"

"Recollect, dear, the first is but seven pounds ten, and is in part forestalled, on account of our difficulty about Rose's music-master; the other we may have to wait for, as we had the last. No, dear, I have thought over everything—till—till—my brain feels sore—my heart is broken. No, it has come to this at last—our father's beautiful copy of Sophocles' Plays must go."

"What! to the Canon, at the miserable price he offered, when you mentioned it to him three years ago? This, when it is worth four times the sum—for the edition is of extraordinary rarity—and—and—more than all *to us*, that papa's dear head lay on it when they found him dead."

"I know it, I know it," sobs Margaret; and the aged sisters weep in one another's arms.

But in a little while Margaret grows calm again, reasons with her feeble sister, lays all before her, points out to her their stern necessity; that though not in debt, save in reference to the above-mentioned little matter of the music-master, the house is utterly destitute of every available means of light, warmth, and food; that, more than all, the morrow is Christmas Eve, and that perhaps with it may come their only earthly friend—their darling niece, their pretty Rose. She is the only child of a dead brother, years younger than themselves; and having brought her up and educated her, she is as dear to them as though she were their own daughter. So the invalid giving at length her tardy consent, it is arranged that Margaret shall set forth to the distant cathedral town early in the morning, provided that no fresh snow fall in the night, and thus render the roads worse than they are.

"But you will ride, won't you, Margaret?" asks Eleanor; "we can owe Broom, the carrier, till we get our money. The old man is very kind, and long our neighbour."

"Yes, but he is as poor as ourselves, and talkative too. No, I will keep our need quiet, and walk the distance. I shall get on well if it is but fair overhead, and be home earlier too than if I waited to return with Broom. So Mary Bradley's girl must come in, and take care

of you, dear; and you must keep your heart up whilst I am gone."

She promises she will, and the sisters retire to rest, when Margaret has made sundry preparations, inclusive of seeking for the two precious volumes, bound in vellum, and wrapping them carefully in paper. They are almost the sole relics of a once noble library.

The morning breaks dull and grey; no snow has fallen through the night, but the clouds are laden with it; and though there has been a temporary thaw, which must have made the condition of the roads dreadful, the wind blows with arrowy keenness. The poor gentlewoman, Miss Margaret Butler, is up betimes; she effects her small household work, carries up her sister her breakfast, then helps her to rise, to dress, to come down-stairs, and to take her place on the sofa, where she has passed her days for nearly fifteen years. She is a great sufferer, but patient and gentle withal. Not a thing for her comfort is forgotten by Margaret; the remnant of the beef-tea is set upon the hob, her toast-and-water made, her books and work put on a small table beside her; whilst, on the other hand, Eleanor's anxiety with respect to Margaret is extreme. She knows the dreary road, the painful errand at its end, and guesses that Margaret's scanty clothing can but ill resist the bitter cold. On this latter point the truth is worse than she suspects.

With so many things thus to do, it is between ten and eleven o'clock before Margaret sets off.

About half-a-mile distant from their lonely house lies a rustic village. Here she calls at a cottage, and asks the mistress to spare her eldest girl while she is gone, as Miss Eleanor is quite alone. To this the mistress gladly assents; for not only is "her little Susy" pleased to go, but the Misses Butler have been the best of friends in many an hour of poverty and sickness, and she is anxious to oblige.

"But you be not surely going to walk all the way, ma'am?" says the woman, anxiously. "My master says the roads be dreadful, and a deal more snow a-coming. I'm sure old Broom would give thee a lift, if only for the sake o' th' years thou hast dwelt amongst us."

"I know he would, Mary; but as I cannot afford to pay, I cannot think of trespassing on his kindness. Now, good day; the roads may be better than I expect, and the snow keep off. Please let Susy be attentive to Miss Eleanor, and keep the fire up with wood I have put ready."

Thus saying, she closes the cottage door, and plods on her weary way.

"Now, Susan," says the woman, "be quickly off; take a bundle o' faggots under thy arm, for I know their wood be low enough, and the coal spent three weeks ago. Ay, it's right hard for ladies like them to know such a deal o' poverty, and this through no fault of theirs."

It is nearly eight miles to the cathedral town, by the somewhat lengthened road Margaret Butler takes, for the sake of avoiding passers-by

who may have known her in more prosperous days. In summer time this is very picturesque, winding amidst hills, crossed by pretty rivulets, and bordered by fields and heathy tracts; but now these natural beauties add to its impassableness and desolation. With snow-drifts, overflowing water, and melted snow and mud, the road for the greater part is a perfect quagmire. Yet the poor gentlewoman plods on, carefully guarding her rusty silk dress from spot or blemish, though soon giving up the attempt to walk cleanly, or to save her feet from getting wet. They are soon soaked through and through, and the wind rising still higher, its arrowy keenness sweeps beneath her scant and threadbare garments, and numbs her limbs, as well as chills the life-blood in her veins. Still she plods on, thinking, if she does not thus strive, their hearth this Eve will be desolate and chill, and the morrow still more drear if Rose should come.

Margaret is within two miles of the town, when, the wind veering round, a mingled cloud of rain and snow comes down; so that there being no shelter near at hand, and her umbrella very old and frail, she is soon wetted to the skin. Still, it is no use repining; so she guards the precious volumes, saves her poor dress as well as she can, and plodding on, wet, weary, depressed, and chill, she prays low inward prayers to God, that He will lay His burden lightly on her, even for the morrow's sake—so dear to all humanity!

Thus it is three o'clock or more before she reaches the cathedral town. Though it is such a dismal day, and such a storm yet pours down, the streets have many passers to and fro, intent on Christmas needs. So, unwilling to be recognized in such a drenched and worn condition, and being too poor to seek the shelter of an inn, it occurs to her to pass into the cathedral cloisters, as these lie near the house of Canon Mosley, whom she seeks. Here she will be able to rest unobserved, to squeeze the rain from her dripping garments, and compose her mind to due fitness for the duty before it.

As she thinks, she does; she passes quietly into the cloisters, feels at once soothed and comforted by the impression of their sublime silence; sits down to rest upon some old worn steps, from which she has glimpses of the mighty western window; notices the groining and tracery of the cloistered roof; the shadows which lie thereon; the solitary robin or chirping sparrow which flits up and down; and then her gaze rests at last upon the square still plot of burial-ground, in some places uncovered by the snow, and so warm and sheltered as to show turfy greenness, and here and there a daisy on the bosom of the dead!

When rested, she wrings the water from her soddened clothes, smooths her rumpled dress and shattered umbrella, and then prepares to go. But just as she is rising, the organ in the choir hard by begins to play, the choristers to sing;

it is the sublime music of the evening service, enriched by that of the advent of the Christmas Eve, and, melting her to tears, gives inexpressive peace to her troubled soul !

In a while she rises, and is about to go, when she perceives that she has been observed by a stranger in the distance, who, elderly, and dressed somewhat as a clergyman, seems advancing towards her. Ashamed of being recognized in her soddened garb, she turns through an archway in the cloister, and is gone.

In a few minutes she knocks at Canon Mosley's door. A pert stripling of a lackey answers it.

"Yes ! the Canon is at home ; but he is busy—cannot see people of your kind—call again." He has viewed her soddened garments with great contempt, and is now about to close the door.

"But will you be good enough to say that it is Miss Margaret Butler ; that she has come far, and wishes to speak to him."

No answer is returned to this, and the door is about to be closed in her face, when a voice behind says, "How dare you?—it is Miss Butler, a Prebend's daughter ;" and the lackey, shrinking away, gives place to an upper servant, of venerable look.

"How do you do, ma'am ?" he says respectfully, as he ushers the lady in ; "I hope Miss Eleanor is not worse than usual—and the young lady well?"

"Thank you, Willis, my sister is much the same. Miss Rose, whom I expect to-morrow, is well. But can I see the Canon?"

"You can, ma'am. But please step this way an instant." As he speaks thus, the Canon's servant leads Margaret into a little room, and closes the door. "You *can* see him," he repeats emphatically, "but he is in a dreadful humour about the Captain's coming to England; for I suppose, ma'am, you know that Mr. Charles has been made a Captain for his bravery."

"Indeed I didn't," answers Miss Butler. "My sister and I knew he was wounded at the storming of Sebastopol, and we have been very anxious about him; as for years he was so much up and down with us, that we loved him almost as a child of our own. But this is really good news. When does he arrive?"

"Oh! he is already come, and has been for several weeks at Southampton; and old Squire Wooton has been there, and made the quarrel up, and says the Captain shall do just as he likes, if only for the sake of the brave fine fellow he is. So I guess, Miss Butler, this will make things all the better for some he loves."

Margaret makes no answer, though the blood which rushes into her pallid and aged cheeks tells how the truth strikes home.

Appearing not to heed her agitation, Willis again asks if she will see the Canon. To this she tremblingly replies in the affirmative; and she is forthwith conducted to his study. He is

an obese man, with a sensual, self-indulgent countenance, and looks as if the butcher's apron or the blacksmith's anvil were more befitting to him than lettered ease or literary duty. Nevertheless, he is surrounded by a noble collection of books, and sits writing at a table worthy of a secretary of state, or the most learned of pundits. For a minute or so he affects not to see her; then he looks up superciliously, going on writing all the time.

"Well—Miss Butler—well?" He does not even ask her to sit down.

"I have called, Canon Mosley, to ask if you will purchase my father's rare copy of Sophocles. I and my sister Eleanor are very poor this Christmas time, and it would be a charity to buy it. You shall have it, sir, for the two pounds you offered, when you bought the copy of Euripides."

"He-m! he-m! I'm sorry for your poverty, but it falls to the lot of many in this vale of tears—he-m! But really at this time I cannot afford its purchase. These are expensive as well as troublous days, and heavy burdens fall on the ministers of the Church. He-m! moreover, the price is too high. I will give ten shillings, I cannot say more."

"A London bookseller has said its worth is as many guineas. To me and Eleanor it far exceeds that sum; for on the second volume our father's head lay, when he was found dead in his house, within these very precincts."

"Ah! it is a long time ago. I think I remember something of the circumstance."

"You may, readily, Canon Mosley — our father, Prebend Butler, was a friend of yours." She is roused to say as much as this—meek lady as she is—for the man's ingratitude is flagrant, as her father reared him, educated him—led to his being what he is.

"There, please cease—I never indulge in reminiscences. Now go, my time is valuable, it is dedicated to His service, and must not be trespassed on. If your poverty be extreme, Willis or the footman can give you a shilling." Saying this, he waves his hand authoritatively towards the door.

Margaret does not trust herself to speak—only as she lifts the books she clasps her wasted hands, "O Lord, in Thy good time lift up the desolate, even for TO-MORROW'S sake." So praying, she goes without a further word.

Willis meets her, sees her tears, leads her into his little room, offers her wine, bids her take a seat.

"No, the wine would choke me—nor can I stay a moment in his house." Then she tells the old butler what his master said.

"It is like him. Though I say it, he is the most selfish and unfeeling of men. But keep up your heart, dear lady—a Providence watches over all!"

"He had need," says the poor lady, "for there

is little to trust to in men's charity or gratitude."

She then takes her way to a small bookseller's shop in a street near the market-place. The owner, like herself, has seen better days; but he receives her with as much respect as he did years before, when she and her sister drove up to his door in their carriage; and their father, Prebend Butler, was amongst his best customers.

She states her business—it is to ask him to sell the books.

"I fear my chance is but small, ma'am; I have so few wealthy people for my customers now-a-days. Have you tried Canon Mosley?—he loves a book of the kind, especially when he can get it cheap."

She shakes her head, then tells him what has just occurred. Even he, an old man, sets his teeth and lifts his withered hand.

"I remember the day when Canon Mosley was a charity lad in Browne's School. He owes all to your father's noble nature—yet such is your reward. But I suppose he doesn't forget or forgive his wife, Squire Wooton's sister that was, so tying up her money before she died, that at his death it must come to her nephew, Charles, or, as I should now say, the Captain. He knows, too, the Captain has a great liking for you and Miss Eleanor. Well, ma'am, never mind; leave the books, and I may be able to part with them. A clergyman has lately come to Wooton Rectory,

who is one of the kindest of Christians and gentlemen. He is to call here some time this afternoon, and I will do the best I can."

"Thank you. You can say whose books they were. And in case that the poor ladies can repurchase them at some future time, ask if he will permit them to do so."

"I will. I hear that he is one whose heart is full of loving-kindness."

Thanking the old man for his courtesy, she goes her way, leaving the books in his care.

She has thus to retrace her steps penniless as she came. She is too depressed to seek further, to ask other aid; all she seems to care for, is to be once more by Eleanor's side, and there kneeling, die. Depression, misery, exhaustion, can go no further. She prays God to hold the bitter cup no longer to her lips!

Avoiding the glittering shops and now lighted streets, she retraces her steps again past the cathedral. The service is over, but the choristers are practising, the organ playing. Something irresistible leads her in, and as she can pass out by a door at the further end, she goes down one of the side aisles towards the magnificent choir. There she stays, leaning by a pillar; for her senses are drowsy, and her exhaustion extreme. The choristers are practising one of Boyce's exquisite anthems—one of those to which the words are often varied:—

"Blessed are they that give rest to the tired wayfarer :
Blessed are they that hold the cup to thirsty lips."

The words are appropriate, and bear response. For Margaret's hand is touched, and lifting up her head she sees an old verger beside her, carrying a lantern.

"Are you tired, madam—are you ill? I think you are the lady who was in the cloisters early in the afternoon; if so, a clergyman has been making great inquiries after you. If you please, madam, as you seem ill, step with me into the vergers' room; there is a fire there."

She nods rather than speaks assent—such is her exhaustion—and follows the old man through divers narrow and arched passages into a low vaulted chamber, hung round with vergers' cloaks, staves, and other things, and, in the grate of which burns a cheerful fire. Here he bids her seat herself on an old oak seat, and whilst she warms her hands and feet he goes to a curious three-cornered cupboard, and brings forth a coffee-pot, and warms what is therein, pours it out into a cup, adds sugar, and places it in her hand. She takes it gratefully, stern and self-enduring as she usually is in her pride.

"Excuse my offering this to you, Miss Butler," says the old man; "but you are ill, and it is the best I have to give. I knew you, ma'am—I am glad to see you in the old cathedral—I hope you will come again when the days are brighter."

"I will, thank you; I must always love the old place. But you practise the precepts you listen to—you have 'given the cup to the wayfarer.'"

"Well, ma'am, I think one deed worth many

words, in the church especially. To-morrow is Christmas-day, and the poorest amongst us may testify to our remembrance of it on this eve, if so we will."

"We may!" and Margaret, again warming her hands, prepares to go. She feels refreshed and strengthened for the way before her. Again she thanks the old man.

"You owe me none, Miss Butler; your father gave of his bread to many—I, amongst the number on whom his charity fell, do not forget the gift."

So he leads the way to the door of exit. The choir is singing some final music—loud—resonant—bespeaking joy and hope:—

"Be of good cheer!—Be of good cheer! Trust in Me and in my laws, and all shall come well in its time. Lo! when the night is darkest, is not the dawn nigh?"

Full of renewed strength she passes on—as swiftly as she can—to the outskirts of the town. The wind is very cold, nay, keener than ever; the moon has risen, it has been freezing, so that the ground is getting hard, yet the snow comes down heavily—very heavily. Still she braves it, and gets on. At a little public-house, placed just where fields and hedge-rows begin, she inquires about the carrier, and finds that he has already gone onward, and that it is not probable that she will overtake his cart, as he has to diverge from his road to leave Christmas parcels. So she goes on as well as she can, regretting,

however, she can have no help by the way, as, seeing its difficulties, she has at last resolved to humble her pride and ask old Broom for a seat.

For a mile or two she progresses well enough, though the snow comes down heavily, and not only eddies round her, but hides the light of the moon. Still she gets on, though slower by degrees; she is so very tired; the snow so clings about her clothes, and stays her soddened feet. Her exhaustion is renewed, her heart dies down again, her faith grows dim. Five miles of the eight are gone, when she thinks she will rest—she is so very weary—and the stupor is returning. So feebly brushing off the snow from a felled tree lying by the wayside, she sits down. She grows colder, more lethargic, more numb; minute by minute goes by, yet still she sits; she is just sinking into unconsciousness, when a gig drives up and stays.

“Halloa, missis! Why be you sitting there?”

No answer; at least none that the stranger, a rough farmer-like man, can hear; so he jumps down, shakes Margaret rather roughly, and repeats his question. She answers, very feebly, that she is resting.

“What! amidst such a snow-storm, and with such a wind? Why, if you be here another half-hour you’ll rest for ever, I reckon. Come, where be you going to?”

Margaret feebly names the village, and her home beyond it.

“Well, I turn down a lane hard by, so I’ll drive

you as far. Come, rise, and let me lift you into the gig."

This she cannot do without much assistance; but the stranger is very kind, lifts her in, gives her a little brandy from a flask, and then, taking his seat by her side, drives on. The brandy and the motion of the gig together revive her presently, her numbness and lethargy subside, and by the time the stranger stops to set her down she is comparatively active. She thanks him, and turns her face towards home, which she can just dimly see, now the snow-storm has ceased.

But now her heart dies down again; there is no light of any kind in any windows—no candle-light in Eleanor's bed-room—no cheerful blaze in the parlour! What can be the matter? Nelly, if something were not wrong, would surely have a fire; there was wood enough for that in the wood-house. What can have happened? Then their poverty and desolation come back upon her soul! She that set forth to seek succour has brought none; penniless—as she went—she returns!

As quickly as she can—though every step seems lengthened into ten—she makes her way along the snowy road, turns through the gate, crosses the lawn, nears the house; she thinks she sees a dim flickering through the parlour window; but the silence within and around the house is profound as that of death.

Opening the porch door, all within is still and cold; from thence into the parlour is but a step,

and there is Eleanor alone—the last spark of the fire dying out—not a comfort or an appearance of nourishment—desolation cannot be more profound! In a moment Margaret has flung herself upon her knees, and her sister is in her arms, returning her embrace, though feebly.

“Dear—dear Nell!” says Margaret, forgetting, in the mortal agony of the moment, her habitual self-restraint, “I have come back to you as I went—penniless—destitute! This is *our* Christmas Eve. Oh! let us pray to pass away and see no morrow! For *us*, whose uncomplainingness has been in itself a prayer, no hope is left.”

“Yes—yes, dear!” weeps Eleanor, though with the feebleness of a child, “we have our darling Rose left to us, and *I* have you. Oh! that you have come back safely is worth all the gold the world contains. Oh! seeing the pitiless storm, my terror about your safety has been unspeakable. Now you are come I care for nothing—*I have you*. Oh, let us have hope—let us be comforted.”

But Margaret will not, and the sisters, in their desolation, weep in one another's arms.

A knock!—The sisters in their deep grief do not hear it. A knock!—Margaret hears it, but her feeble “Come in” is not heard. A knock!—Then as Margaret feebly rises, a back-door, leading into the kitchen from the rear of the house, is opened, and a voice says,

“A London letter for you, Miss Butler. The post is not long in, for the rails have been blocked up with the snow.”

Margaret goes and takes the letter; she wonders who it can be from, as she has no correspondent in London, and as it is dark she cannot see the superscription.

"I was just to say, too," adds the postwoman, "that old John Broom has got a tidyish-sized hamper for thee, and that if thee'll be good enough to sit up for a bit he'll send the lad with it, as them as paid him for bringing it was partic'lar in saying it was to be sent to thee at once."

Closing the door, Margaret comes back into the parlour, kneels down before the fire, stirs up the dying embers of wood till they emit a fitful blaze, and then tears open the letter, from whence drops into her hand a bank-note for £5. The writing consists of but few words—ill-spelt and ill-indited—but they suffice to inform her that the money is from the woman named Ann, who, living in their house, robbed her and Eleanor many years before, that this sum is in part repayment, and that if the writer live, the whole shall be sent back again. The letter is simply signed, "Your repentant servant, Ann," and bears no address but that of "London."

Her consciousness as to a want of faith checks anything like exultation in the heart of Margaret. The organ, resonant and sublime, plays again in fancy to her ear, and utters its loud reproach; so, stealing gently to the side of Eleanor, she kneels and whispers—

"Dear sister, my want of faith is rebuked.

Here is your dream come true. Here is 5*l*. Our hearth to-morrow will not be desolate."

Again the sisters weep—this time gentler tears.

When they have talked the subject over, Margaret rises, seeks for an ancient fragment of wax candle, with which for years she has waxed her thread, lights it, goes to the wood-house, finds wood there, brings it in, has soon a cheerful fire, and then learns that little Susan went home at four o'clock, ostensibly to go some errand for her mother, and when done to return. This she did not.

"Thus I was alone, dear Margaret," says Eleanor, "and, as you know, was unable to fetch wood or prepare for you in any way. My neglect of you must therefore be forgiven."

It is—this without asking.

Just as the kettle boils, and Margaret has taken off her soddened things, the hamper arrives. It is a very large one, and Miss Butler knows by the direction that it is from Rose. Yes! Here is their beloved thinking of them. Here a new rebuke to her want of faith.

"If you please, ma'am," says the lad who brings it, "the carriage is paid, and Mrs. Bradley said I was just to tell you that her Susan went sliding near the barn and sprained her arm, and so couldn't come again; but that she herself would be up right early in the morning, and stay with you as long as you need."

"Tell her to do so, please; and let one of her

boys come with her, to bear a message back to his father. Tell her not to forget me, as Miss Rose is coming."

The boy gone, the doors locked, the key of one hidden where Mrs. Bradley will find it, in order to let herself in in the morning, Margaret, tired as she is, proceeds to unfasten the hamper; the kettle, though boiling, being in the meanwhile forgotten. Eleanor holds the candle, and Margaret, bringing the hamper to the spider-legged couch, kneels down before it. Raising the lid, the first thing she sees, as she expected, is a note. She opens it—it runs thus :—

"Dearest Aunties,

"I send you a Christmas hamper, holding as many useful things as I could think of. What I forget please pardon, as I have much to occupy me just now. I shall be with you to-morrow by three o'clock. Please dine at four; and as I shall bring company with me, let all the eatables I send be on the table. Most of these are cooked, in order to save you trouble. Besides this, dear aunties, you must be in a very charitable and loving mood, for your little Rose has been doing what perhaps you will think is very foolish; but you must and will forgive her.

"With love, your sinning ROSE."

"Bless me!" says poor Eleanor, her pale face growing still more intensely pale, "what can the child have been doing?"

At once the whole truth rushes into Margaret's mind; so, bending forward, she says, very softly,

"The child, I think, has been getting married."

"Married!" exclaims Eleanor—"to whom? Charles Wooton is not yet returned, and she loves him, I know; besides, she is so very young—not yet eighteen."

Miss Margaret then proceeds to tell her sister what she heard at the Canonry to-day; and, putting this and other circumstances together, their conjecture amounts to certainty.

"Because," says Margaret, "the dear child has no money of her own. Ten pounds a year, as pupil teacher in a country school, wouldn't permit of presents such as this; besides, the dear child had no money when we sent her a trifle a while ago. No, the Squire, in his way a fine-hearted old man, though a little crotchety and obstinate, has either taken Rose to Southampton, and so had her married there, or else Charles has come down to Wooton Hall, and she was fetched there from school."

In this way the sisters remain a long time conjecturing and full of surprise, in some degree vexed that Rose did not consult them, but otherwise very proud and pleased.

The search into the hamper is presently renewed; it contains an acceptable stock of grocery, inclusive of tea, sugar, and other things. Then comes a great plum-pudding, only partially to boil to be quite perfect; a goose to stuff and roast; a grand piece of sirloin already cooked; a pigeon pie; a boiled ham, tartlets, mince pies, fruit for dessert, four bottles of wine, and something a little stronger for punch.

"I'm sure," says Eleanor, "if I had nothing else to tell me, I should know that these fine filberts and golden pippins came out of the old orchard at Wooton."

"And I recognize the old cook's hand in this delicious pastry and plum-cake," adds Margaret.

When the nice things are stored carefully away, Margaret makes herself and Eleanor some tea, and, after partaking of this and other refreshment, they retire to rest.

It is late when Margaret awakes next morning, and then she finds the good woman from the village standing, with a very cheerful countenance, by her bedside.

"A happy Christmas morning to you, ma'am! If you please, Miss Eleanor says I am to make the tea, and bring you your breakfast, for you are not to get up yet. But I have been here a good while, ma'am, and so has my husband, sweeping the broad walk across the lawn. I have made the parlours neat, and lighted a fire in the best one, and taken off the sofa and chair covers, for I felt sure you would like it in holiday fashion, as you'd be sitting in it to-day." She says this so meaningly, so kindly, so smilingly, that Margaret feels sure she knows something.

"Mary," asks Margaret, eagerly, "do you know anything of Miss Rose?"

"Well, ma'am, I believed it wur to be kept a secret from you, but as I've been thinking you've guessed it, why, you may just as well know what

news old Johnny Broom brought wi' him from the town last night. Why, that Miss Rose was married yesterday morning at Wooton Church, and this by the new parson, that not be come there long—Mr. Hopton——”

“Hopton?” repeats Margaret, with intense surprise, as the blood mantles to her face.

“Ay! ma'am, I reckon you'd know the name. My maister's old mother, that just luckily be come to us for a day or two, and so can cook th' bit o' dinner for the children, and leave me to be here, says it be the same Mr. Hopton as used to come up and down to the prebendary-house when thee and Miss Eleanor wur young ladies, and she wur cook there. Well, for some reason or another, folks never exactly know'd, he went, as chaplain, to a foreign country, and was away many years. But ye see, old Squire Wooton, whose friend he'd been, had his eye on him; and when the parson o' Wooton died off—which ye see he didn't do till he was past ninety—why, the Squire sent for Mr. Hopton, who wur right glad to come to his own country, and to such a nice rectory house, and lot o' money, as there be at Wooton. Well, Mr. Hopton had only just begun to settle down, when there comes the grand news about the storming o' that great place in the Crimea and the young Squire's mighty bravery—for which our good Queen has since made him a Captain. So, hearing this, and of the young Squire's wounds, why, the old man's heart wur melted to the biggest pity, and a deal o' regret wur his, that he'd been

so testy and off-hand like. 'Why,' says he, 'am I to be such an old grampus and fool as stand off from a brave lad like this, as has done such honour to the old name, and all because he loves a pretty girl, a deal younger than himself, and without money, but who, otherwise, has a power o' riches in a good heart, a good name, and much beauty?' So off he set at once, with Mrs. Ramble, the housekeeper, to Southampton, and there, for some weeks, they nursed the poor captain, for he wur very bad. But as soon as his dreadful operation wur over, and he could be moved—"

"What operation?" asks Margaret, breathlessly, as well as Eleanor, who listens from her bed in the adjacent room.

"Why, his right arm was shattered by a cannon-ball. At first the doctors thought they could save it, but they couldn't, so off it had to come, right high by the shoulder. Nor is that all, for he'd a sword-cut in the leg. Well, about a fortnight ago, down they brought him to Wooton. A few days ago, when he wur a deal better and could talk a bit cheerfully, he says merrily—when his uncle, and the housekeeper, and the doctor were all helping to dress his wounds—'A pretty fellow I shall be, I fear, needing a nurse all my life.' 'You shall have one, my dear boy,' says the old Squire, right gravely; 'I'll see about one to-morrow.'"

"No one thought he was serious; but he wur; for the day before yesterday he went off in his carriage to the village where Miss Rose wur,

asked to speak to old Miss Grimpen, the governess, and then telled her he wur 'come for her teacher.'

"‘She can’t go,’ says the old missis, right crossly, ‘not till to-morrow or Christmas-day ; ‘I thought Miss Butler knew as much ; for the girl has the china-closet to dust, my best cap to trim, and other equally important work to do.’

"‘I’ve some a little more important for her, ma’am,’ says the Squire, drily—‘to nurse a sick and wounded soldier.’

"‘Nonsense,’ says old Miss Grimpen (for she pretended to be very shocked) ; ‘a highly improper thing for a child to do.’

"‘Not for a wife,’ adds the old Squire.

"‘Wife !’ screams Miss Grimpen. ‘A child like Rose a wife ! Pray, who are you, sir, and by what authority do you come?’

"‘By my own, ma’am. My name is Wooton, and I live at Wooton Hall. Rose Butler has got to marry my nephew in the morning—a brave soldier, whom his Queen has honoured ; and Rose from that hour is mistress at Wooton Hall.’

"‘Bless me !’ and Miss Grimpen proceeds to ask a lot of questions.

"‘There, ma’am, I’ve no time to make answers to your catechism. Put the dear child’s things in a box, and let her come.’

"So Miss Grimpen takes it on her to be as smiling as just before she was cross, and helps Rose wi’ her things ; so that the dear young

lady was soon on her way, the old Squire being all the while as tender to her as a father.

“When they got to the fine old hall—which they did towards evening—the old Squire left the dear young lady wi’ Mrs. Ramble, and went into the parlour, where the wounded gentleman was lying on a couch.

“‘My dear boy,’ he says, ‘I’ve brought you a nurse.’

“‘Have you?’ replied the other, indifferently.

“‘As you seem careless about her, my boy, I’ll bring her in, and let her speak for herself.’ So he returns, and takes in Miss Rose, looking, as the old butler told Broom, most lovely. The wounded gentleman did not see her till she was close beside his couch, and, stooping, whispered, ‘Charles.’ Then in a minute he started, and looked and saw her, and understood all, and gathered her to him as well as his feebleness would let him.

“‘My love,’ he said, when he had called her a hundred other loving names, ‘I have but one arm now. The one gone my country had; the other is yours, to gather you in, to shield you by—if so you will.’

“Of course, Miss Margaret, the dear child did not say no; but, kneeling and kissing him again, wept like a babe.

“‘She shall be yours, and in the morning, my dear boy,’ says Squire Wooton, ‘I have arranged everything. You shall be carried to church, and

Hopton shall marry you. In the meanwhile talk it over.'

"For a whole hour the Squire leaves them ; and when he goes in again, there be the dear child kneeling by the couch, just as he had left her.

" 'Come, my dear,' he says to her, 'I must now consign you to Mrs. Ramble. In the morning, when we have made you a little wife, you shall begin your duty of nursing as fast as you please ; but not till then.'

"So just as Squire Wooton said, he did. Mrs. Ramble took care of the young lady, and got her a dress ready ; and in the morning—that is, yesterday morning—Captain Wooton and she were married. As soon as the matter wur over the Squire left them, and went off to the town with Mr. Hopton, taking with him the great hamper which you got last night, and which Mrs. Ramble and Rose had packed. Old Cask, the butler, wur the one that gave it Broom, and paid the carriage, and told him just all I'm telling you ; and which old Broom told me and my maister last night."

Margaret says but little ; she is too moved with what she hears.

When they have breakfasted the sisters rise, and put on the best their scanty wardrobes allow ; but this made to look better than it is by snowy laces and other nameless attributes of gentlewomen. Then Eleanor goes down into the best parlour, where her spider-legged sofa is wheeled ; and Margaret, though feeling ill and weary, finds

up linen and other things for the dinner-table, and helps Mary to prepare the best chamber for Rose and her soldier-husband. But Mary, the kindest of humble friends, will not let her do much; but makes her go down into the parlour, and rest there by the brightest of hearths, when she has dressed up bowls, vases, and china-plates, with holly, crysanthemums, laurustinus, and other flowers just gathered from the garden.

"Now, dear Missis," says the kind creature, "don't worry a bit about the dinner, or the coming company; but leave all to me. You know I know your ways, and how things are to be served. And there ain't much to do. Nothing but the goose and vegetables to cook, and the pudding to warm."

So by the blazing fire—burning so brightly because of the frosty air—with the pleasant wintry sun beaming through the three lattice windows, with pyracanthus, and holly, and laurustinus, feathered with snow, dipping outside the panes; with blooming flowers within—with hearts at ease, the sisters, who were yesterday so mournful, take their cheerful rest.

It is noon. Margaret, who is worn and ill, has sunk into a little doze in her chair, when a gig drives up, an elderly gentleman alights, and, bearing a parcel, is ushered by Mary into the pleasant parlour. He is coming in, as Margaret, aroused by Eleanor, rises; so she and the stranger meet face to face.

"Mr. Hopton!" she says, faltering, and almost sinking.

"Margaret!" he replies; and setting down his parcel, takes both her hands in his. For a minute she does not speak; only bends her head with reverence towards them.

Seeing her agitation, he moves away an instant, greets Eleanor, then refers to the parcel he has just laid down.

"I have brought back the 'Sophocles,' Margaret, and will with your pleasure make them mine; though in a manner different to your intention."

She makes no reply, only weeps bitterly. He leads her to a chair with tender homage, and draws one to her side.

"It is five-and-thirty years since we met. What was it then that divided us *I* never knew."

"I do," she weeps; "the sin was mine. It was that which causes so many broken hopes and broken hearts—human pride."

"Well, we'll repair the error as well as we best may, though the wine of life with both of us is running to the lees; you fifty-two—I fifty-seven. Still I love as truly as I did in the days of your youth, and have come now to offer you again what you once negatived. You must come home to me for ever, be mistress of Wooton Rectory and its income, and we'll nurse Nelly tenderly between us. This will be better than dependence on any one—even on relations so sweet as Rose, or her noble husband. In this way I will strive to make

amends for the years of undeserved poverty I have been told of."

Margaret makes no reply ; only lifting up her face, gives by her grateful look her answer to the other's soul.

"I was thinking of you yesterday, Margaret, when I met you in the cloisters. I knew you, though time has so changed you. Well, we will endeavour to make some redemption of the happiness we have lost ; for I have no belief in any old age of the spirit. That is of the Infinite, and can know no decay. The body is finite, and so falls into wrinkles and obtuseness."

So Margaret consents ; they arrange their plans, and then recur to Rose and her soldier-husband.

They are still talking, the day is waning, the goose and other things in an exquisite state of progress, when the Squire's carriage arrives. The sisters have been listening for its coming with beating hearts, and now Margaret would rush out, and clasp her beloved child in her arms, but Mr. Hopton restrains her.

"No, let the girl lead in her soldier-husband. She wishes so to do, and, weak as he is, any sudden agitation would be detrimental."

So Rose comes in, her husband leaning on her, his arm about her neck. She is a lovely little creature, scarcely yet in the radiance of her extreme beauty—all dimples, roundness, and flowing hair. She comes forward, her husband still leaning on her, and kneels between those who have been the tenderest of mothers to her.

"Forgive me, dearest aunts. Love Charles as you have always loved him. He wanted a nurse, and who could be so tender to him as a little wife?"

They may well forgive her, for they do not think she has sinned; but press around her, knowing not what to say or do in their extreme joy and deep affection. They raise her up, they weep about her, they load her with caresses, and are as tender to her husband as though he were their son.

"Rose and I are come to stay a month with you, Margaret and Eleanor," he says, "and you must help her to nurse me, as well as forgive my stealing away your prize. But my uncle, an old bachelor, was quite right; he knew none could be to me like Rose. Such reward is worth many limbs, and many wounds."

So they wheel a couch beside the fire, and lay him on it, pale and stricken as he is; Rose kneels beside him, the arm which is left encompassing her.

Then the old Squire, who has lingered behind, comes in, and is very friendly and kind, and apologises for the past, and says what he has now done and means to do must in some way be his atonement. To this he adds that in a month's time he shall expect the young people home, where Rose will be mistress, and abundance be hers.

Then they draw about the fire—Mr. Hopton with them—and talk earnestly till the day has waned, and the dinner is brought in.

This is excellent, goose and pudding included; after it comes dessert, with fine old wine which the Squire has brought in his carriage. Whilst drinking this it is settled that Wooton Rectory shall be prepared, and Margaret and Eleanor go home there in some six weeks' time.

After coffee, and whilst it is yet early, the Squire and Mr. Hopton go; the former full of all imaginable kindness and generosity to Rose.

Then comes the true Christmas—the hour of peace and love—of sympathy and affection; when the two sisters speak as to a son to the wounded soldier. They tell him of past trials—of the trial of yesterday—and of the coming of the CHRISTMAS LETTER.

Whilst it is yet early the patient and his nurse go to their chamber; the sisters to theirs.

It is a heavenly night, frosty, and rich with silvery moonlight. When all is still—when she is the last stirring in the peaceful house—Margaret goes softly into her sister's chamber and kneels down beside her bed.

“Throughout the blessings of this day, Nelly, one thing has still been present, and reproached me—my want of faith—my prostration before trials which were merely human.”

“Sister! for the future we will both have larger faith and hope.”

We all need these. In them the recurring festivals of human life should deepen our belief. For, after all, human trials are but the phantasmagoria of an hour—one round of actions on a

narrow stage, whilst beneath runs on the eternal current of spiritual life, as full of hope as it is of beneficence and good!

* * * * *

Whilst Lucy thus reads the CHRISTMAS LETTER, young Amy Morfe sits happily by the fire, intent upon finishing some woollen wearable for her dear aunt. She leaves Shirlot the day after the morrow, so that there is no time to lose. Nanny is gone to help at the hall—a great treat and privilege to her—so that Amy is alone. A knock comes at the door, and is repeated. She says, “Come in,” but no answer is returned, so she has to rise; and then when she opens the door and looks into the cloister she sees the chaplain’s nephew, his cigar wafting little spiral clouds as he walks up and down. She has seen him but twice during these holidays—once when he called to bring her aunt a book, and again when she and her aunt spent an evening at the parsonage; but as his manner on both occasions was taciturn and reserved, she seems surprised to see him here.

“Quite alone, Amy?” he asks as he comes near and takes the cigar from his mouth.

“Yes, sir; aunt is at the dinner, and Nanny is helping in the kitchen.”

“Very good. What time does the party break up?”

“Between eight and nine—never later.”

“It is now just seven, so there is an hour at least. Let me come in; I’ll leave the betrayer here.” And as he says this he puts out his cigar

and lays it on the cornice-work of the cloister arch.

She trembles much as he takes her hand and comes in, for she has been vexed by his seeming indifference. Considering what his manner has been to her on several occasions, she has more than a passing interest in all he says or does.

"Amy," he asks, as he sits down in her aunt's chair and bends towards the fire, with a gaze which bespeaks both deep respect and love, "have you been vexed by my manner since you came home?"

"I don't—"

"Don't tell a conventional fib, Amy, for appearance sake," he interrupts; "you must tell the truth to me. Have I vexed you?"

She hangs down her head, in that childlike way which is so truly her own, and which is so irresistible—"A little, sir. I wondered—I thought I must have offended you."

"I am glad of it, darling; not because of the vexation caused—for the shadow of a sorrow, much less a sorrow itself, should not come near you if I could help it; but because you have interest enough in me to be vexed or pleased by any deed of mine. No! I have been purposely undemonstrative, that our secret might not transpire. I love you very dearly, as mostly stern, reserved men like me love, and it is precious to me that the matter should be unknown. When do you go back to school?"

"The day after to-morrow," she answers, bending down her face.

"Then we must part to-night. I leave England early next month, so we shall not meet again for two years. If life be spared and circumstances prosper, I shall send for you."

She fully understands his meaning, though she looks up wonderingly into his face.

"You will come, darling?"

Her answer is inaudible, though she bends towards him entreatingly, as though she is willing he should interpret it for himself.

"You mean yes?—you love me?" he jealously questions, as he draws his precious prize into his arms; and her head so rests upon his shoulder that his face is hidden in her braids of golden hair.

"Yes, yes—I love you very much; but then I cannot leave aunt; she would be so desolate: and I love her also, who has been so very good to me."

"But, Amy, coming to India to your husband for a few years is not for life. When I am rich enough I shall come back again—be sure of that. I see that, in spite of some knowledge of geography, you're a silly little bird—rather afraid than not to fly from the old nest."

"We should be sure to come back again?"

"Certainly, if life be spared."

"I will come, then; because—"

"Why hesitate? Because you love me?"

"Yes!—but aunt must know."

"Not at present, gold hair! When the time comes I will send a letter. For that letter you will reckon, if you love me."

"I do love you, Islip! I never shall forget that day we walked together along the lane, and you bid me take off my hat!"

"It was to see your hair, dear one—the most precious sight, to me, the world holds!"

"But auntie, Islip? Withholding the truth from her, who is all truth, isn't right—it will only make me unhappy."

"Not for a few months—say a year—till I see what my prospects are, and how soon I can send for you! I will then write her a full explanation, as well as to my uncle, who I think already suspects the matter. But were it broached now, a thousand obstacles would be raised, which will not be when my prospects are sure. Wait for this letter to your aunt—expect it, darling. I can only be perfectly just to you, whom I so dearly love. Meanwhile, I bind you by no promise—shall not write to you till I have written to your aunt—ask nothing but to keep this secret a little while, as something very precious to me, and which it is most to my taste to have unspoken."

"When the letter comes I may tell aunt all?"

"Everything, dear."

"Then I'll be honourable, Islip, and never breathe it to living ear till you allow me. But won't aunt be surprised? She is bringing me up to be a Government schoolmistress, and does not even dream I am to be a wife!"

"Yes!—but I think she'll be very happy when she knows whose wife you'll be. Meanwhile, get

all the knowledge you can ; for I shall like my golden-hair to be wise as well as lovely. For the rest she will reckon of the letter, will she ?”

She says, in her innocent way, she shall ; and then, when their promises have been again and again reciprocally given—when he has folded her again tenderly and tenderly within his arms—when he has secured one golden lock of hair that “auntie won’t miss,” he goes. She steals with him to the end of the cloister ; and then, with pride and love in her heart, returns.

Not a whit too soon for the safety of the precious secret ; for Miss Morfe comes presently in.

“I fear you have been solitary, dear. I hope you have been happy.”

“Very, auntie!”

The pretty little maiden speaks the truth.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SHADOWS.

CHRISTMAS is scarcely over before the old shadows again descend—the violent manner, the cruel looks, the crueller words ; the constant irritation about small pecuniary matters, which a sensible child would scorn ; the thousand eccentric ways, which none but those who have had the misfortune to be shut up with mentally diseased people can imagine ; and the parsimony which robs life of every joy—make the days sad, and often the nights too. But for the old stone-floored room, with its bright fire and pretty hopping robin, with his cheerful note, outside upon the window ledge, Lucy's life would be sad indeed. To the old room, therefore, she flies more and more ; and Miss Morfe steals in with kindly looks and loving words, and Miss Mackintosh comes too, when she has a spare hour ; for from Mrs. Hutchinson she has learnt the sanity and insanity combined which

make Mrs. Eden at times a dreaded personage at Shirlot.

Lucy would go, would have gone long ago, were her health not greatly broken by unremitted literary work, and a too continuous residence in the mephitic air of London. This makes her wish to see some days of spring in this beautiful land of brooks, woods, and hills; but it is not likely to be, for the shadows fall darker and darker. Friends far away, not knowing these things, have advised her to stay the winter; and now again advise her to stay through the freshness of spring. Other motives there are, too, for this prolonged visit. She is poor. She lost by an important literary work, which it was said would take six months to write, but which took fifteen; and Lucy has been anxious to repair a misjudgment so unfortunate—she has been anxious to spare the expenses of a winter in London—rent especially; and now spring is coming on, she would like to inhale its freshness. But the shadows grow, and the necessity of flight is sure. They grow the more rapidly because it is known that she is poor. Not the conception of work in hand; not the recollection of generosity in days of adversity; not the knowledge that the little Christmas festival was won by a weary pen; not the truth that all extraneous expenses have been justly paid; and not the truest recognition of all, that of the human tie, serves in any way—but lower and lower the shadows of perverse malady fall!

Extraneously, things at Shirlot remain much the same. Amy has long ago gone back to school; and Islip Austen sailed in February to Calcutta, his secret safe, as it seems, in the one heart to which it is confided. His uncle, it is evident, misses him greatly. He wanders restlessly to and fro—comes more than heretofore to the hall; and he is more neighbourly than ever to Miss Morfe, for he brings her books and newspapers in abundance. They never meet but Islip is talked about—he is ever the burden of their conversation.

Mrs. Hutchinson is still an invalid. The surgeon tells Miss Morfe and Miss Hazlehurst, in confidence, that she is consumptive. For days together she never leaves her room; then she rallies a little and comes downstairs, and writes letters, receives visitors, and keeps the accounts, as usual. But fortunate for her that Providence led to her hand so wise a coadjutor as Miss Mackintosh. This firm, self-resolved, earnest, well-trained woman carries on the whole duties of the place in an admirable manner. Silent reforms begin to discover themselves, and miscalled gentlewomen, as Miss Pockle and Miss Simpkins, already understand that one now governs them whose “yea is yea,” and “nay, nay.”

Greatly differing in character, as also in views, Miss Eden and Miss Mackintosh contract a pleasant friendship. They sit by the study fire together; they visit together the most pleasant old gentlewomen; they walk out together; and now soft

winds begin to blow, now the field and forest paths get dry, now the lanes are full of primroses, and tufts of scented violets lie purple under many a budding thorn, they make holiday excursions together. Mrs. Hutchinson has introduced Miss Mackintosh to all her country friends, and to their houses. She is, therefore, invited; and thither Lucy occasionally accompanies her. One Wednesday afternoon they cross a ridge of hills into a mining district, and here, in a wide-spread cottage, surrounded by pits and primitive heath-land, they are hospitably welcomed. The master is absent; but the ladies are kindly, and show Lucy an admirable and very large collection of rare Non-conformist literature—old folios, old quartos, tracts of extraordinary rarity and value—as the result of the love and labour of three generations. Another afternoon they visit a country hall, placed amidst low-lying woods and springing corn-fields, where farming is carried on on a magnificent scale, where a whole ox is weekly salted down as provision for the farm-servants, where ale is brewed in vast stationary vessels and conveyed to the barrels by pipes, and where the mistress, in a closet through her dining room, draws it, by the taps of a beer-engine, and delivers it, through a shutter, into the great kitchen, with as much ease and delicacy as a lady controls the movements of her watch. On other occasions they visit another great mining region, and discover mental cultivation and profound thought, though joined to primitive manners and provincial speech.

As Easter approaches, Miss Mackintosh is busy with preparations for its festival; for on Easter Monday, yearly, four little maids go forth into the world, well clothed, well trained, and with a small purse for exigencies, and four children supply their places. This year, alas! but three go forth; and sorrow-stricken is the matron's heart when she thinks of sweet-faced, tender Rhoda.

Thus Lucy has to take her long walks alone. But there is recompense enough for mere human solitude. Leaves are coming thick upon the woods, and the moss upon the hills has been dried by the sweeping winds of March. Since the day she first spoke to her, Lucy has occasionally seen the woodman's wife, though there has now been a long intermission of a walk that way, owing to the many weeks' snow, followed by piercing easterly winds. But now Miss Mackintosh's engagements leave her free to choose her path, she sets off one afternoon to see this young woman. She leaves misery enough behind her—misery which creates the dread of all return to it; but the glorious solitude and peace of the woods soon restore equanimity of mind and cheerfulness.

Lucy half expects to see Mrs. Ray—for such is the young woman's name—nursing her baby on her sunny door-step; or, if not that, growing convalescent by her chamber fire. But though the sun shines warmly, and all the roadway in front of the pretty cottage lies bathed in its light, the door is closed, and all looks desolate and chill. A white smoke, curling slowly up towards the blue

sky, is the only outward thing to show that it is a human habitation. Lucy enters the little strip of garden before the door, peeps through the casements, and thinks that she sees some figure seated crouching by the fire. She next taps at the door, and opens it. She then sees that it is the young mistress herself who thus sits so sadly on the hearth. On the stranger's entrance, she turns round a hopeless, weary look, as though comfort could neither come nor be expected.

"Mrs. Ray," says Lucy in astonishment at what she sees, "where is your child? what is the matter?"

The young woman rises, bursts into tears, and stands there statue-like till again spoken to.

"Dead, ma'am—I had a fall in the frost, and the child was born before its time. It lived three days—the pretty creature—and then died—and—and—" She says no more, but her tears burst forth afresh.

"This is very weak of you, Susan—very childish. Where heaven sends one flower, it sends many. If you keep good heart, another will soon fill its place, but not if you thus give way to weakness and tears. Why did you not send for me? Bad as the weather has been for so long, I would have come if I had known you had been ill or in trouble."

"I was very bad for many days, and this scared everything out of their heads, I suppose; and when I did name it, master didn't like troubling you in such weather, but said he'd borrow a cart

and drive me over to Shirlot when the days got warmer and longer. Perhaps I am the more desolate now, as mother only left me last week, and I take to heart the loss of the little one from being yet so weak and so alone."

"This mustn't be—I will ask Mrs. Hutchinson to let one or other of the children come and see you. For I'm going away, Susan—and this soon, though the day is not fixed."

"Dear me, Miss, this is a pity, now spring is breaking so beautifully—and so thin and pale and anxious as you look."

"I am sorry too, Susan, for Shirlot is dear to me in many ways, but I am not happy. In time to come, when things are changed, I shall visit it again, be sure."

"Ay, ma'am, I see what the cause of your going is. Mrs. Eden is a fearsome old lady at times—I've heard as much."

To this Lucy makes no reply, only reverts to the subject of Susan being so much alone.

"Mother would have me go and stay with her, you see, ma'am, but then I must leave the master alone, and that won't do. If I could get a nurse child, or a decent female lodger, or something of that sort, it would be the best thing, for master, you see, must bide by the house—that we can't change."

So Lucy, promising she will mention her wants to the old gentlewomen at Shirlot, as they may know child or friend who would like a country lodging during summer days, goes presently.

Susan is, as can be seen, greatly cheered by this visit; and as she watches the lady from the door, she entreats her to come again soon.

"I will, Susan, be sure, in a few days, and make you a last visit before I go."

The hedgerows are burnished with countless primroses, and of these Lucy gathers a large handful as she goes along. They will garnish some of her mother's old china cups and dishes, and bring spring into her room, she thinks, as sweetly as it lies out of doors.

Her mother is at tea, as she opens the door from the cloister, with a dreading and a beating heart.

"Mamma," she says, as she closes the door, and glances towards her mother to see what is the humour of the day, "I have been a nice walk, and have brought you these flowers—they will dress up your old Delf jug beautifully."

"Curse you! If you put your stinking flowers into my jugs, I'll soon turn them out. I want neither you nor your flowers." With this—holding her hand to her head—she seizes teapot, sugar basin, cup, and milk jug, and rushing into the store closet close by, locks the door, and from the pouring sound which immediately follows, continues her tea. That her child has none matters not.

What can be done but to beat a retreat into the silent old study—to rouse the fire, and gather the books around?

It happens that Miss Mackintosh passes pre-

sently by, and stepping in, guesses that Lucy has had no tea. She makes no comment, but departing presently, Selina soon comes tapping at the door.

"If you please, ma'am, Mrs. Hutchinson has taken the liberty to send you tea." With this the little maid sets down the tray, and hurries away, leaving a far more dainty meal than Mrs. Eden in her parsimony provides.

These miserable days glide by. In the old sequestered room is literary hope, and the pure joy which only intellect can give; without is nature in her vernal prime, and around are loving human hearts, amidst much of the mental frost and credulities of old age. But otherwise there is infinite woe; yet even for this there is pity, for disease and evil in all their shapes are simply but perversions of everlasting law.

And Easter comes and goes. The pretty maidens go forth with their small dowries, as happy as human creatures can be; whilst Selina looks forward to the day when she too shall go to the mistress who is to love her so well.

CHAPTER V.

THE BLOSSOM, THE STORY, AND THE FAREWELL.

AFTER Easter comes weather as cold as that of February—easterly winds, and dull, sunless days of rain. The old gentlewomen, dreading these east winds, shut themselves up, like the gay people, in a weather-house, and intense silence reigns through the cloisters and galleries of Shirlot.

It has rained all day, it is a prematurely dark evening, and Miss Thorne having gone through the farce of “dessert,” and taken her nap, the scared servant brings in tea. Most delicately, yet sparingly, is it set forth—a few biscuits, two slices of wafer bread and butter, a silver tea-pot, and pellucid china.

“You’ll go to the village now, Maggie, whilst I take tea, and tell Mrs. Price it is not convenient for me to pay her just yet.”

"I said so last time, missis, and——"

"I've before told you of the vulgarity of the word 'missis.' Call me ma'am. Repeat my words, that is all."

"If I'm to say that, the morning will do, the night is so wild."

"It rains but little, the high wind does not matter—go!"

Hardly-treated slave as she is, Maggie is not without her sense of duty and justice. She obeys, but as she leaves the room she grumbles out loudly,

"I live with very religious folks, I know, people as has prayers six times a-day. But Miss Morfe wouldn't turn out *her* maid, dear lady and Christian as she is."

"Cease, woman, go! Lost as you are, I'll pray for you, and for the heathen gentlewomen you speak of—go!"

Alone, and her first cup of tea finished, Miss Thorne gets up to go to the window, and look out upon the weather. She rarely sits with her blind drawn, and never with the window wholly shut, be the weather or time what it may. As she looks forth, she sees it is a wild night; the rain has almost ceased, except for now and then a few large drops; a struggling moon sheds a sort of dim light, but otherwise it is wild and tempestuous. The wind rushes madly through the new-leaved trees, and roars round and round the gables of the hall, as though willing to bring it level with the ground.

As she stands thus at the window, which has a wide view of one of the great gardens and the outer lawn, she perceives some small dark object standing by the lodge. Presently it comes on towards the hall, pausing often, and as often hidden by the shadows. At last the aged lady returns to her seat, resumes her tea-cup, and shudders as the wind roars round and round.

A quarter of an hour has gone by, and she still lingers over her pleasant meal, when some one knocks upon the door. It is a feeble knock, a doubtful knock, as though the intruder knows there will be no welcome. She rises, goes to the door, opens it, and looks out on to the landing, which, formed into a small waiting-room for Maggie, is where she daily grows blue and cold, but with her dim sight Miss Thorne can at first see nothing. But looking closer, she perceives standing on the upper stair a small figure like that of a young girl. It is not one from the hall, for the little snowy prim cap at all times betrays the pretty sisterhood, but some one poorer, some one wet and ruffled by the night's storm, and with something which looks like a bundle wrapped closely in her arms.

The little figure still stands statue-like, till Miss Thorne says tartly, "Who are you?—What do you want? The gates are about to be locked, beggars are not encouraged here."

"If you please, ma'am," says the little figure humbly, "I am no beggar—I am only Rhoda."

"You Rhoda! you dare to knock at the door

of a lady of character. Go! Elizabeth Thorne never encourages sinners."

"If you please, ma'am, I only want to know where Miss Morfe is, and if——"

"I wish not to talk of that heathen woman. Go, I am encouraging vice by talking to you." So saying, the bitter old woman is about to close the door, when a little cry, the feeble cry of very early infancy, comes sharply on her ears.

"What's that?" she questions sharply.

"My baby, ma'am. He is wet and cold, I fear—he is not a month old."

"Baby! Go!—go!—or stay!" she arrests her aged steps, even whilst she is fleeing from sin so great, and, returning into the room, fetches a tract. This she thrusts towards the little trembling figure, saying as she does so, "Read this, be saved; but never trespass on my threshold more!" So saying, Miss Thorne, recollecting nothing of a precious story in a Book she daily reads, closes her door upon the pitiful wanderer. Poor bigot!—poor ignorant, old, icy-hearted woman, herself the greater sinner of the two!

Slowly descending the stairs, hesitating at every door, weeping bitterly, hushing her wailing babe, Rhoda turns into the cloister, and sees light shining through the chink of the first door. Who can be here?—can it possibly be Miss Eden? She knocks hesitatingly, but not so hesitatingly as on that other door.

"Come in," says a kindly, cheerful voice, "come in!" and the little mother, lifting the latch, sees

before her the dear lady, bending as busily as ever towards her pen.

Miss Eden is not dull to recognition. No sooner does she see the little trembling figure, and the burden in her arms, than she guesses all. In an instant she has risen—in an instant she is beside the weeping mother.

“My God, Rhoda, is it you? Come to the fire—you’re wet and cold. My poor one! many will be glad that you’re back again, if only to save you from further sorrow! Sit down here—put you’re feet on the fender—let me see the baby—tell me all!”

One word of this divine pity, one tender look, the simple outstretching of the loving hands, and the whole heart of the young mother is wrung by its great agony.

“I went away to Temeford,” she sobs, “to hide my trouble, and because he was to meet me and make me his wife. But he never came. The letters I wrote were never answered. The little pocket-money I had was soon gone; and the last day, as I went along the road, hoping to meet him, and that he would come at last, he passed by me in a gig, with the teacher. She saw me, if he did not; and I knew by her looks, and her flaunting finery, that he had made her his wife. I dropped senseless as a stone, and lay a long time so in the turnpike house, near which I had fallen. When I recovered myself, and could think again, I thought I would go to my old cousin, and see if she would take me in. But she was cruel beyond

expression—she called me names, and shut her door in my face. Long before that time, I had heard that work was easy to be had at salt-making in Cheshire; so there I slowly went, begging bread by the way. I was fortunate—I got work, and just managed to live, till the baby came, three weeks ago. Then, as I saw I could not do such work with a nursing child, I thought I would come home again, beg forgiveness of my dear mistress, and ask her to befriend me till baby was old enough to leave, and I could go to service. I am sure—”

“You were wrong, Rhoda, in going away at all,” interrupts Lucy. “When that base man behaved as scandalously as we now all know he did, you should have at once complained. Punishment would have been then brought home to such a ruffian.”

“I couldn’t!—I couldn’t!” she replies, as she bends her face down towards her babe.

“Why, Rhoda?”

“Because,” she answers in a whisper, dove-like for its pathetic tenderness—“because I loved him.”

“Still, Rhoda, you were wrong. If he had not been punished, he might at least have been made to do you justice.”

“I thought he would. He had told me I might hang him if I pleased. But I am glad that I never harmed him—that the evil he did is all his—for he is my baby’s father.”

“Your forbearance does your heart great credit,

Rhoda ; but you must never think or speak of this man again. He is married, and has passed from you for ever. Now, unpin the shawl, and let me see your child."

She unfolds her ragged coverings, and there, unconscious of all sin and woe, lies the child so precious to its mother. She awakens it with her kisses, she hushes its weak wailings ; and whilst she holds it in the cheery glow of the bright fire—for it is wet and cold—her tears drop down more fleetly than before.

As Lucy regards her with infinite pity, a thought crosses her brain which fills her heart with gladness, though she does not refer to it in what she says.

"Hush, Rhoda ; you must not give way to useless grief. The past, as to us all, is irrevocable ; but endeavour can brighten the future, however dark. Miss Morfe is at present away nursing a sick brother, who, in his day, was basely ungrateful, but of which her noble heart takes no reckoning ; and Mrs. Hutchinson is very ill. She has been ailing more or less since you left ; but two days ago she broke a blood-vessel, and a physician from Temeford has been called in. He gives no hopes of her recovery, though she may linger yet some months. Neither of these ladies can I, therefore, consult ; though as soon as possible Mrs. Hutchinson shall be told that you have returned, as I think it will be news of a most cheering kind ; for your disappearance, connected with the robbery,—"

“What robbery?” asks Rhoda, amazed.

Miss Eden proceeds to tell her, as also of the strange but most fortunate advent of Miss Mackintosh.

“You have no reason to be troubled about the robbery, Rhoda—it was never laid to your charge. A man’s footing was traced in the rooms and gallery, and young Hutchinson was seen by Harris. It was only strange that both circumstances occurred on one night. But wait here—I will lock the door, so that no one discovers you, and I will go and consult Miss Mackintosh what we can best do to assist you.”

Miss Eden repairs to the hall, and she and Miss Mackintosh confer together. It is at once judged that Rhoda must not remain at Shirlot, or have in any way connexion with the place; and Lucy mentions what has already occurred to her, as to finding the young girl, for a time, a secluded and quiet home in the woodland lane. Miss Mackintosh thinks the idea an excellent one; and they then resolve to confide the matter of her return to old Harris, with whom it will be sure to remain secret, and find her a resting-place in his house till Mrs. Ray can be consulted, and the return of the hour of evening will permit her to depart from Shirlot unseen.

Throwing on her shawl, Miss Mackintosh at once repairs to the lodge, where the old gardener, seated by his solitary fire, enters most kindly into the plan; for Rhoda was always a favourite with him, and no one has been more indignant than he

at the wrong she sustained. He rouses up his fire, he swings over the kettle, he puts ready the bed in the spare chamber where his children sleep when they come to see him, and prepares, as well as he can, for his poor and unfortunate guest. In half an hour's time, and fortified with comforts from the hall, Rhoda is seated by his fire, and, hushing her babe, tells, weepingly, her sorrows to the fatherly old man.

"I'll not say more of that villain, Rhoda," he says, as he rubs his hands in the blaze, "for it's a shame to speak on him, than to say he's enough of it. We thought the teacher bad enough at the hall; but she's worse as a wife. A slatternly, vile-tongued spendthrift—that 'ad soon bring a careful man to ruin, much more a ne'er-do-well spiritless drunkard such as Sam. Ay! and she's a devil's spirit too, for in spite of old Mrs. Clayton's boast that nobody could master her, she has been mastered. Yes, and turned out too, for she and her daughters had to budge last week on the top of a waggon-load of goods, and all crestfallen like beaten cocks. Shirlot's shut on 'em, and no loss, though there's days o' reckoning I take it as well for the folks they left behind."

Early on the following noon, just at the hour when she is sure that John will be home at dinner, Lucy goes to the cottage, and breaks out her project of Rhoda's going there. She frankly confides the poor girl's history and name, and asks secrecy, which the young husband and wife promise, and as readily proffer to be true friends.

"It'll be nice company for the missis," says John cheerily, "for she's but lonely when I'm away, seeing there ben't no better neighbours than th' trees—and it'll save me from having to send her off to her mother's, and being all lonely by myself. As to that fellow at Shirlot—he shall ha' no word on her from tongue o' mine."

"But it's the baby, master," says Susan, thrusting back her plate—for all this news is more a dinner to her than the viands before her, "it's th' baby as'll be th' joy. Though it can't be quite like my own blessed one, it'll be a sort o' comfort to see and hear it through the livelong day. I'll get little Tom's cradle down again—and shirts and frocks, and t'other things—if it be happening to want 'em."

"This is very good of you, Susan," answers Lucy, "but Mrs. Hutchinson will be sure to see that Rhoda does not want, so long as it is necessary for her to remain here to nurse her child. When that is at an end—you may perhaps like the child well enough to let it stay with you. Rhoda must then seek a place, and it will be easy, I daresay, to find her one at a distance from here. Meanwhile, to help her, Miss Mackintosh will give her needlework to do, of which there is always an abundance sent to the hall."

This same evening, when dusk has fallen, old Harris drives Rhoda in his cart to the woodman's cottage. A hearty welcome awaits her, and this none the less that in Susan's eyes the baby is so wonderfully like the one she mourns.

Though thus comforting and saving others, Lucy's own nights and days are wretched beyond all expression. The cupboard is so closely locked, the meals are so pinched, that, saving for thoughtful Anna Mackintosh, there would be starvation in the old quaint stone-floored room. But every day at noon pretty Selina comes tripping with her snowily covered tray, on which is a warm and gladdening meal enough for two; at five o'clock the little maid comes tripping with her tray again—and thus there is plenty and some comfort within these grim shadows.

Up and down, up and down, through the night, the insane yet wisely sane woman walks, muttering to herself. She sleeps on the sofa—she locks herself up in the little store-room—she rushes here and there—she flings things from her hands—in fact, the wildest imagination cannot reckon up her mad antics. Her mood would make war in Heaven, or amidst a host of angels, were opportunity given.

Lucy has money come, and nothing now hinders her departure, but the finishing of some needlework by the little scholars. A day is however fixed; but it is kept secret, except from certain dear old gentlewomen, who may safely be confided in, lest there be an outbreak worse than any gone before. These same old gentlewomen, however, confabulate together, and resolve to give a little farewell party to the dear lady they love so well. So it is arranged to take place in Mrs.

Boston's room, the evening before Lucy goes. This, like the departure, is kept secret.

To the end of this invitation, Selina brings the following note into the quaint stone-floored room :—

“Certain ladies of Shirlot—namely, Miss Hazlehurst, Miss Salway, Mrs. Boston, Miss Holte, Mrs. Rutland, Miss Paget, Mrs. Corwen, Mrs. Mynor, Mrs. Hastings, and Miss Anna Mackintosh—present their kind love to Miss Eden, and will be pleased to see her to tea, at the room of Mrs. Boston, on Wednesday evening next, being the eve of her departure. And if Miss Eden will favour them by reading the tale it is said she has just finished, she will add to the great literary favours already bestowed, and honour and delight her loving auditors.”

While Selina waits Lucy writes this answer.

“Lucy Eden's kind love to those of Lady Shirlot's gentlewomen who have honoured her by so kind an invitation, and begs to say she will accept it. She will also read the story of ‘Art in Bronze.’”

It is Saturday noon, when Miss Mackintosh, stepping into the old room, asks Lucy to take a drive with her, as a neighbour has lent a gig and servant. So taking an early dinner they set off, through a lovely country, formed by the valleys of the hills.

“Dear friend,” says Anna in a low voice, as they drive on, “all is arranged and goes on well. Last night I broke out to Mrs. Hutchinson the matter

of Rhoda's return, and I cannot express to you her joy, or the relief it is to her. She is most grateful for all you have done, and for the home secured. She now wishes to see Rhoda; so before I came away I asked Harris to fetch her at dusk this evening, and take her back again. Mrs. Hutchinson and the girl will thus see each other alone, and it will be best under such painful circumstances. It was necessary, I found, to take Tibb into our confidence, as she is so much in the sick room; and the good creature is as pleased and pitiful as though Rhoda were her own child. 'Such a little creature—quite a child herself,' she keeps saying, 'and yet to have a baby! God help her!—God help her!'"

After making some purchases at a village shop, they drive onward, and just as the first sweet shadows of this spring day begin to fall, they reach another village of great rustic beauty. Here in a wide-spread cottage, half buried in ivy, and with a horse-block and old draw-well quaintly set in the little fore-court before the door, with a plantation on one side, through which you catch glimpses of an undulating cow-grazed paddock, and with barn and stabling and orchard running out in the opposite direction, Lucy Eden is introduced to one of the mistresses of the place, the other being from home. She is a young woman of gentle manners and kindly heart; and being a lover of flowers, and a rearer of poultry, she shows her treasures of garden, green-house, and barn-yard, with great pride, and then makes tea for her guests.

Thus spending their evening in so pleasant a manner, it is nine o'clock before Anna and Lucy set out on their return home. In Lucy, a solemn dread weighs down her spirits, as her face is again turned towards the place so charming in itself, but so miscalled "home" to her.

As old Harris assists the ladies to alight, and opens the white gate for them, they see his cart waiting, and he whispers that Rhoda is hard by. So when they step into the large kitchen, there they see the little mother and her babe. She is weeping, not because she is unhappy, but because her dear mistress has been so forgiving, so kind, so pitiful, and so full of mercy.

"Had she been hard to me," she says, "I think I could have borne it better. But Mrs. Hutchinson would keep saying, that as most of my trouble had come through her and her worthless son, she could never be pitiful or good enough to me. And she kissed little Sam, ma'am, and cried over him, till I was sorry to see her tears. She says she will pay Mrs. Ray for my board, till the boy is old enough to be left, and then she will get me some good place, where by industry and care I may do well, and yet see happy days."

"As most surely you will, Rhoda," replies Lucy, "if you make the struggle and endeavour in a fitting spirit. But you are happy, I hope, with the Rays?"

"Very, ma'am, they couldn't be kinder; and as to little Sam, Susan says already that he is the joy of her life."

"All this is well. I am going on Thursday; but I will come to the cottage and see you before I go."

Rhoda now makes her dutiful curtsies; and the ladies saying, "good night," walk onward to the hall. As they pass into the cloister, Anna presses Lucy's hand.

"I wish, dear friend," she says, "you had not to enter here."

"I dread it, I assure you. Countless times in my life have I, as well as others, dreaded the return home to her. My childhood was indeed one great sorrow of this sort. But the time is short now, and this day week I shall be happy and independent once more. If I absented myself wholly, it would give some reasonable pretext for her quarrel with me; and hitherto I have given none—indeed, have been careful to give none. The war is all her own—all the figment of her own malady."

Miss Mackintosh passes on, and Lucy lingers for a moment with hesitating hand; then she opens the door, and stands amazed at what she sees, so many years now is it since a vagary of this sort came before her sight. A light is set upon the mantelpiece, and shows the room denuded of all its furniture, except in the space before the high window, where it is gathered in a half circle round where the sofa stands. The chairs are piled upon the tables, and fender, fire-irons, tubs, and coal-scuttle form the lower defences of the barricade. Over this outwork the sweeping curtains are drawn so as to form a sort of tent;

and within the old lady has made herself a luxurious bed on the sofa, with nearly all the bedding.

Lucy, however, says not a word ; but makes her bed as well as she can, and goes to it. In the morning when she awakes all the things have flitted by magic, as it were, back to their places ; the old lady has breakfasted, and locked herself into the large closet. Remonstrance or speech is of course useless—so Lucy dresses, and repairs to the old room, where Selina, ready dressed for church, brings breakfast. At noon Lucy dines with Miss Mackintosh, and spends a pleasant evening with Mrs. Hutchinson in her room. The poor lady is a little better, though the shadows of the great change lie visibly to all upon her.

So the intervening days glide by, half wretchedly, half happily, and Wednesday comes. The little maids have finished the labours of their needles beautifully ; the woman who waits on Mrs. Eden, and who throughout has been most kind to Lucy, has done hers of laundress and general helpmate. So Lucy, having packed her books, sets off about noon to bid Rhoda good-bye. She finds little Sam in Susan's arms, and the young girl, brisk as a bee, busy with some household occupation. She looks happy and contented, as far as the shadow on her soul permits.

“I suppose I have brought you a treasure, Susan, in poor Rhoda and her babe ?”

“You have indeed, Miss—little Sam especially. He's put new life in my heart, and to hear the

cradle rock is like music to me. The little one will soon be dear to me as my own; and come what may, he shall never want a home or a friend."

Rhoda comes down the lane, a few last steps with the lady.

"I hope, Rhoda," says the latter quietly, as they stand together in a solitary shadowed bend of the lane to say farewell, "that I shall hear of your well-doing from Miss Mackintosh. Avoid all visits to Shirлот, unless Harris comes to fetch you; and, above all, avoid that man if you see him, or if, hearing you are here, he is base enough to come after you. The whole good of your future life, and that of your child, depend upon this prudence."

Tearfully and very sincerely the young girl makes her promise, and thus they part.

When she reaches Shirлот, Lucy has a fresh injustice and wound to bear. The old lady has thrown out all her things—boxes, wearing apparel, and so forth, into the cloister, locked her door and gone abroad, no one knows where. But Miss Mackintosh smooths over the insult, and Selina, as dutiful as ever, is the bearer of the hospitable tray into the quaint old room.

As the belfry clock strikes five, Lucy takes her way to Mrs. Boston's room. The dear old ladies, ever ready for their tea, are assembled, and, with many words of love, they welcome her who has borne indignity so well. But nothing does she say thereon; in cases such as this taste and good feeling ask but one thing—silence.

Now, when the hospitable meal is over, Lucy sits by the sunny window, and whilst the knitting needles go round and round, she reads her newly-written story of

ART IN BRONZE.

There entered into Birmingham one summer's morning, by the Lichfield road, a young man dressed as a respectable mechanic, who, from his dusty shoes and weary look, had apparently walked some distance since break of day. He carried a small bundle swung on a stick across his shoulder, and in a wide button-hole of his fustian coat were fresh-gathered sprays of the dog-rose and sweet honeysuckle, that bespoke the shadowed hedge-rows and dewy woodlands. In a street near the centre of the town he stepped into a decent coffee-shop and took breakfast; and then, after removing all signs of his long morning's walk, he commenced what seemed to be his business in coming to the town. This consisted in making various trifling purchases in small iron warehouses and in shops, where hooks and nails and fittings in iron and brass were sold. In all these places he seemed well known, though in some his business, trivial as it was, provoked very lengthy and querulous discussions, the subject matter of which might be pretty fairly judged by one or other of two things—either that the master called the “missis,” or else, taking

a little grimy ledger off the cobwebbed desk, ran his work-worn forefinger down column after column, to stop short, or shake his head, when he did get to the bottom. In the last shop the young man entered the master could not proceed an inch without his "missis;" so being summoned from the adjacent kitchen, and her busy preparation of something excessively savoury for dinner, if it might be judged of by its smell, the good dame came in, folding her arms in her apron, as a tacit sign that she was quite equal to any description or amount of forthcoming argument.

"You see, Mr. Thornway," she said, as her eyes followed her husband's finger to the ledger, "my master's tender-hearted like in this business—for old John Newport is a long-day customer; but, really, if we could have a little money——"

"Ay!" interrupted the humble brass-founder, with extreme kindness of voice, "for he could make such a lot, as you well know, Thornway, if he would but leave off those drinking habits of his. It is a pity; for what with his own mighty cleverness, and his brother being verger to the cathedral so many years, why——"

"Be patient a little longer, M'Clure," said the young man, "and what my honest old master owes you shall be clear enough; for things have been getting straight since the business has been more in my own hands."

"Well, well, this is very good of you, I'm sure," rejoined Mrs. M'Clure, with a readiness that bespoke improved opinion, as well as a degree of motherly

selfishness in her purpose; "and the more so, as you're no relation to the Newports. But you'll step in, Mr. Thornway, I'm sure, and share our dinner; there's a knuckle of veal and ham in the pot, and a raspberry pudding. You're welcome, I'm sure; for it's a long way back to Lichfield—." And Mrs. M'Clure, with woman's quickness of thought in such matters, had already, in her own mind at least, got out the two silver tablespoons, her best table-cloth, and bidden her pretty daughter run upstairs and put on her silk gown. But though the young man was by no means an ascetic, or disliked pleasant company and a good dinner, both were too much at variance with his sad and thoughtful humour at the moment. With the excuse, therefore, that he had to be at home early that night, as his old master waited for the small strip of brass moulding to finish a lock belonging to the cathedral, he again made a kindly promise of speedy payment of old John Newport's debt, tied the strip of brass with other things into the handkerchief, and, bidding the M'Clures good day, left the shop.

"Well, there," said the mistress again, wrapping up her arms energetically within her apron, and leaning against a roll of sheet-iron beside the counter, "I like that young man, Simon. There's a something straight-up-and-down in his way, that one takes to without helping it."

"And I'm not far wrong, I fancy—though it's human nature to predict a shining light in any

other class but one's own—that there's something more than steadiness in that young fellow; for some two or three years ago he came to our master, I know, with a design for a bronze and electro-plated fender, which Betley, our foreman, told me exceeded in originality anything he had ever seen. But the firm could not afford to take it, though most desirous, because, from the very newness and originality of the whole thing, it would have been pirated in a week." This was said by a decent, elderly artisan, who, on his way home to dinner, had thus stepped into M'Clure's shop to make some trifling purchase.

"Well, Richards," replied old Simon, "what is new in his doings comes from God and his own heart, and the rest from his own diligence, for he was nothing more than a poor lad old John Newport picked up in one of his drunken bouts amongst the Ketley forges. But he's mighty industrious, and somehow or another fell in with Mr. Graydon, of Ryeton Manor, a year or two ago, who I fancy has been a sort o' master to him in many things. Be this as it may—for he's uncommonly silent over all his doings—he's been more than a son to the old drunken blacksmith, who must have gone to the parish months ago but for Oliver."

"Well, well," added Mrs. M'Clure, still more emphatically, for she had a woman's intuitive insight into the probable future effects of present causes like these, "all this only makes one's sort-o'-can't-help-it goodwill the stronger. So I tell

you what, Simon, the very next Sunday we can get Timmis's light cart, you and I and Rose will go over and see the old verger and Doll Newport ; for I like the girl, though our Rose thinks she's over-shy and proud for one so young."

"As thee will, missis, as thee will," replied old Simon, good temperedly, "you women always do as you please in these things. So now let's have dinner, for I want some pudding, and, after it, my pipe."

Oliver's way, in order to regain the Lichfield road, led him past the well-known Royal Hotel, round which, as he approached, he found a crowd collected. But intently full of thought and passing onward unobservingly, as thoughtful people do, he found himself all at once in the thick of the crowd, unable to retreat or to advance. At first, desirous to advance, he pressed onward, till his attention was arrested by a girlish face within an open carriage, before the hotel door, which some of the bystanders by their conversation soon informed him was the only daughter of Lord Clare, the Minister. Pressing forward no longer—for this face interested him—Oliver suffered himself to be swayed to and fro by the undulations of the crowd, till he stood beside the panel of the carriage ; and there taking his stand, with a footing too firm to be oscillated by an ordinary gaping mob, he had not only a full view of the young girl's most beautiful though haughty face, but could overhear much of her conversation with a

gentlewoman seated beside her, as well as with a gentleman who came presently forth from the hotel.

"I suppose that it is exactly as I thought," spoke the young girl, in a subdued voice, to her companion, as she glanced haughtily on those surrounding the carriage, "and that papa can see nothing worthy of art; nothing—unless it be in the shape of a butter-boat, a platter, or a slop-basin; no, it is not likely; for you have only to look around upon this mob, Bertha, to cease all wonder why vulgarity and pettiness are supreme above taste." So saying, the young girl threw another, but haughtier, glance around, and then sank further back in her luxurious seat, like the Sybarite on his bed of roses.

"Hush, hush, Aurora!" replied her companion, "you know not what ears may be listening, or what feelings you may wound. Besides, you are so entirely wrong in your contempt for the artisan classes, as to make me often wonder to whom will descend Lord Clare's noble opinions, as to the mutual good faith, appreciation, and service due from each separate class to the other, especially in reciprocation from high to low, from low to high. And you are increasing your always expressed contempt for the people who have to labour, because you cannot in one moment find what you call an artistic-shaped ink-stand; yet be certain, Lady Aurora, if your class and the middle-classes of this country had but taste in amount sufficient to call for these things,

the artisan class would not be long in producing the needed Cellini. Never yet did an age or an art call loudly for a genius, but it came."

"Ay, Bertha," laughed the young girl, with sweet-voiced though withering scorn, "you and papa agree in all your tastes, I know; and are united in your belief that, if the masses were duly educated, not only Flaxmans would arise, but also a universal appreciation of such. Well, have such belief, and imagine, if you like, such a state of things; I only know that when I am mistress of Clare House in town, and Arden Hall down here, I shall as soon think of dancing the Minuet *de la Cour* with my French cook or butler, as throw open, like papa, my Guidos, Raphaels, and Rembrandts to the people!" And the young girl laughed with a sweet girlish laugh, though it was expressive of contempt.

It is not difficult to define what Bertha's wise and thoughtful answer would have been; and it would have been so, for half the noble measures, which had made Lord Clare so popular throughout the country, had sprung from, and been elaborated by her large and comprehensive intellect; but, at this moment, a care-worn, debilitated, but eminently handsome man, somewhat past middle life, came forth from the hotel to the carriage side, and addressed the young girl.

"My pet," he said, "you are half a sorceress; the dozen or two of inkstands Hillman gathered together this morning, at my desire, are not worth the trouble of choice, though there are styles and

shapes, from an obelisk down to your favourite simile of a slop-basin. But *n'importe*, if we can succeed no other way, we can get some large copies of the Petrarch inkstand cast; though the foreman of one of the largest firms has just told me that there is a great chance of our obtaining some new and perfectly good design, as, of late, many improvements have been made in this branch of art. And there will be time, as our library cannot be finished till late in the autumn, and it is my intention to remain at Arden till the ensuing February."

"Well, papa, if we remain there till one of your and Bertha's favourites achieve something beyond the slop-basin, I fear I shall have grown grey—though with this consolation, that your long-tried hopefulness may have led you at last to adopt some of my opinions."

"Never, never, spoilt one," smiled Lord Clare; "Time, like Douglas Jerrold's play, 'must work wonders,' if I am to make you, what you say you wish to be, a world-mover behind the curtain. Ay! my darling, this must be it."

Aurora gave a little wilful pout, but made no answer; and as her father, the popular Minister of the day, bowed to the enthusiastic greetings of the crowd, and his carriage, into which he had entered, drove away, she took a French novel from the seat beside her, and left all further discussion relating to the inkstand to him and Bertha.

With earnest and resolved manner, and rapid steps, the young Lichfield artisan left the town;

but instead of pursuing the highway as far as he had done that morning, he took a more picturesque, if a longer road; and following it through deep, shadowy woodlands, country lanes, and sweet, peaceful fields, kept on, without halting once, till the sun had set. Then, as the woodland closed thickly around him, making premature night within its shade, he halted by a rapid, ample spring, gushing from a rocky knoll, on which fell the waning light of evening through an aperture in the leafy roof, wrought lately by the woodman's axe. Here he laved his hands and face, dusted his shoes in the rich waving fern, and then went on again several hundred yards, still up an ascent, and still within the dark shadows of the trees. At length, where the woodland suddenly broke off, he came upon a garden, only divided from it and the ferny sward by a low paling; and skirting this for some distance (tall fruit-trees, and hollyhocks, and evergreens overshadowing the path in wild profusion), he stood all at once abruptly on a beetling edge of rock, on whose grey platform yet remained some ivied remnants of an ancient castle; whilst very far below stretched a wide valley, threaded by a river, now silvered by the same rich sinking sun as flooded all the landscape. After standing for some minutes on this bare ledge of scarp rock, to see the splendid scene outspread so far away, he opened a little wicket, and entered the large bowery garden which ran round two sides of this old and quaint place; whilst on the two other

sides were the sheer precipice, and the soft sward, sloping to the woodland, and used for pasture, and occasionally as a bowling-green. These ruins had, evidently of recent years, been fashioned into a sort of cottage or small homestead, which, low-roofed and many-gabled, leant, as it were, amidst a profusion of ivy, against the old tower on the verge of the green precipice.

Entering through a sort of half brewhouse, half dairy, common to homesteads of this character, Oliver found himself in a large, old-fashioned kitchen, quaintly furnished, and lighted by a bright wood fire, which burnt cheerfully upon a raised hearth within the wide chimney. Beside this sat an old woman, watching a skillet of milk set there to boil, but who, hearing and recognising the footstep, turned kindly round to welcome the young man.

"I am glad to see thee, Oliver," she said, "and so will the squire, for he sent word down by Mr. Maskell, this very morning, that most likely my old David would have to ride over to Lichfield for thee. So sit thee down, thee look'st tired, and must have a cup of ale, till David be in from the wood, when we'll have supper." So speaking, the good dame set a quaint bee-hived-looking chair on the hearth opposite her own, welcomed the young man to take a seat therein, with an old-fashioned courtesy very pleasant to behold, and fetched the ale from a small cellar near at hand. As she gave him this, Oliver inquired about the squire, and when he might see him.

"Why, you had best let him sup before I say you are here," replied old Letty, "for you know you are a long stayer, Oliver, and Mr. Graydon hasn't been over well; but how should he, sitting up at nights as he does, now the great telescope is finished."

"Ay, it is a wonderful thing I hear, and making a great stir in this part of the country."

"Well, it brings many folks up and down to the tower, and keeps master and the old chaplain employed night and day; but for the rest, Oliver, between you and me, no good can come o' peeping into hidden things in this way. What God lets us see with our eyes is well enough, but to go beyond that is——" The old servant concluded her remark no otherwise than by a shake of the head, more expressive, however, than a dozen words. Finding her guest offer no reply, she then rose, and spread a fair damask cloth on a small tray, set on fresh gathered fruit, brown bread, and pouring the now boiled milk into a glass jug, took up this frugal meal, and bore it from the kitchen through a groined door formed evidently in the thick wall of the tower, against which the rustic homestead leant. As soon as she returned, she said, "Mr. Graydon would soon have supped, and that Oliver might then venture up into the tower." She then prepared a more substantial meal for the kitchen, by laying a cloth and setting forth cold meat, fruit tart, and bread, and cheese, and ale, with a provident care that looked like a welcome; for scarcely was this done

when in came her husband, an aged but hale looking countryman, accompanied by a man many years his junior, who, by a pack on his back done up in a black glazed cotton, and a large amount of lacquered jewellery, was evidently a travelling teaman, trading on his own account. He had that bold, forward manner which is disgusting in any class, but eminently so when joined to low breeding and ignorance. He had stridden across the kitchen and slapped Oliver on the shoulder familiarly, before even old David, to whom the young man was as honoured and endeared as he could well be, could say one word of greeting.

"Ay, man—thought you was out on the stray somewhere—as the adage says, 'when the cat's away the kitten plays.'"

"I scarcely know what you mean, Mr. Coggs," replied Oliver, with a cold reserve, that would have set easy on a man of the highest breeding; "but my trade takes me from home sometimes, as well as my neighbours. As for——"

"There, there, my good fellow," interrupted the tea-man, "don't perform the part of gentleman-artisan, as I am told you do. All I had to say is, that old John Newport has been making a jolly day of it; that's all."

"It cannot be," replied Oliver, "for I left him at four o'clock this morning, already at work, and with a hard day's toil before him; and as for means——"

"Pooh," laughed Coggs; "now you're pay-

master, folks in Lichfield will trust ; but he hadn't gone on the strength of that ; those in the crowd I saw pushing him up the street said he had been selling a large book of plates, and so got drunk on the profits. But, of course, this is nothing to me ; all I know is, that his family don't take like him, and that his sister-in-law, the verger's wife, is an uncommon nice woman, very affable, and so on ; and as for the daughter, though she's but a lambkin yet, Lichfield don't show a prettier, though I say it ; and as I shall by-and-by want a Mrs. Coggs, I shall, I daresay, give the old lady a pound of three-and-sixpenny black, by way of a beginning in that direction." All this was said with a jocose familiarity, meant to be as offensive as it was ; for though Dolly could not yet be considered much beyond a child, and had never been more than a sister in his thoughts, Oliver liked too well the beautiful and trusting innocence of her nature, and owed too much to those of her name, not to be intensely chagrined at this familiarity in one, whose pretensions to respectability were chiefly founded on his having lately opened a small, showy shop, for the sale of tea, in a mean street of Lichfield.

He subdued, however, his fierce, manly anger, and sitting down in the bee-hived chair, waited patiently the teaman's departure, which soon took place, when that personage found old David and his wife rather cool in their invitation regarding the supper set forth. So, after taking a glass of ale, and delivering a parcel of tea from his

pack, he departed ; not, however, without an immense flourish as to the hot supper which awaited him at a farm-house about a mile through the woodland ; and a hint again to Oliver, that Mrs. Newport was his ally with respect to Dolly.

All breathed more freely when they heard this man's retreating footsteps along the garden path.

Supper was then begun, and soon finished as regarded Oliver, who, rising whilst these good old folks yet lingered over their peaceful meal, crossed, and left the kitchen by the thick door already mentioned ; and closing it behind him, stood for a few moments in the quaint old circular chamber into which it opened, as if, like one touching the holy veil of a temple, he would fain, before he uplifted it, bring forth from his heart, and place upon its front all that was best, severest, and most manly in his nature. Then he went gently onward, with a reverence that every step implied, up a few broad oaken stairs which spread themselves far out into the chamber, and by these which bent through the wall of the tower into a part of the homestead, and in again by a doorway, he stood, after passing this, and closing it behind him, and ascending a further step or two, with a heavy oaken balustrade on either side in a room well dedicated to the purposes of sublime and ennobling science. It was circular, and cased with fretted stonework ; and at even distances, in the half circle looking towards the valley, were set tall windows quaintly ribbed with stone, and through which now fell the silver flooding glory

of the early moon, in such descending volume as to dim the single lamp which stood lighted upon a large table in the middle of the room, covered with books, papers, and astronomical instruments. Another broad staircase of a few wide richly-carpeted steps, placed at right angles with the other, led up through the roof on to the observatory above, and on these the moon itself shimmered with placid grandeur. Curtains of black cloth, though nearly all undrawn, swept downward in vast volume, presses of books rested in groined niches, tables of all shapes and sizes stood about, densely covered as the one in the centre of the room; and whilst the knotted oaken floor was partly carpeted, one wide, old leather-covered couch stood rearward in the shadows. From the ceiling descended various astronomical instruments connected with the observatory above.

At this centre table sat a man past middle life, who, hearing the closing door, and the ascending footsteps, looked up from the writing which occupied him, and turned a face of singular benignity, yet ascetic aspect, towards the stair-head, where Thornway stood for the moment hesitatingly.

"Well, Oliver," he said, in a voice, and with a manner of such kindly welcome, as to bring in an instant the artisan to his side, "I am glad to see you. I fancied you were here by Letty's anxiety that I should not linger over my supper. You are a favourite with my good old servants, who are otherwise tenacious of visitors."

"You must at least pardon this intrusion now, sir," replied Oliver, "for the hour is late, and much beyond that in which I have been used to see you; but the truth is, Mr. Graydon, that the fame of your great telescope, and its splendid speculum, has reached us in Lichfield, and I am here to-night to ask a new view of that which a year since opened up, as it were, to me new regions of originality in art. I want to model a Bronze Inkstand, and in the Bell-shaped Nebula I fancy I shall see the form I need."

"Well, Oliver, in so doing you will strike into a path where sublime and creative truth will rise up before you at every step; for though I am a verifier rather than an inductionist, though I seek to discover in the abstract laws of astronomy scientific truths that may serve the processes more immediately relative to the moral and physical condition of humanity, still, as I have always said, when they shall be guided by the severe prose of nature, not only art, but also government, morals, politics, and religion, will surely produce their largest, and as yet unexpected, effects. I am glad you are come; for I was desirous of assuring you of my friendly thoughts, though so much occupied of late by the usual yearly visit of my brothers, and this great alteration, or rather addition, to my small observatory. But you look ill and labour-worn; how is this?" As he spoke, Mr. Graydon took up the lamp before him and held it for an instant near Oliver's face.

“Why, I have walked far to-day, sir; and I have of late had many anxieties respecting my old master.”

“Certainly, Thornway, it is to be lamented that you are so bound; though no one more than myself can admire the zeal with which you stand by the fortunes of so true a friend as old John Newport has been, and who by his often-repeated words made us acquainted. Now, as it will be some hours before the heavens can be effectively swept with the great telescope, go rest on the couch, and I will call you at the needed time. At present I have an hour or two's work to do, which cannot be omitted.”

Mr. Graydon said no more, but resumed his pen, whilst Oliver, going to the couch, lay down; and though much and deeply interested in the scene around, he was too exhausted to refrain long from the sleep which came over him, and which lasted till midnight. He was then awakened by the same kind friend, and led up to the tower-roof on which were fixed the several telescopes. It was now deeply shadowed, for the moon was hidden, the heavens partly veiled in darkness, and the wide valley and the dense woodlands below lay with the deep hush of night upon them.

Almost without a word, other than a few astronomical directions, this rare cultivator of science placed Oliver before the great telescope; and here, guided by the directions given, that which was thus so ardently sought was found, only in a condition so immeasurably more grand

and wonderful than as seen by him before, as at the first glance to send back his heart's blood to its source, and after this to fill his whole being with that intense reverence whose very speechlessness is prayer; for what the smaller speculum of a smaller telescope had shown as mere vapoury light, now, through higher means accorded to vision, resolved itself into a system of countless worlds, hung shaped a mighty bell of giant mould, as if to ring out to the immeasurable universe that God is omniscient and all-loving, and man's destiny sublime.

The artisan turned—but it was to go, in silence, as it seemed, till stayed by the astronomer's hand.

“Pardon me, sir,” spoke Oliver, in a voice scarcely above a whisper, “let me go now, and in silence, for my spirit has an inspiration on it which it must obey. Out of the one form is growing the needed form, and, therefore, let me go, before the impulse that is on me disappears. My lonely, homeward path is what I now desire.” He said this with the utmost respect, and then passed down the observatory stairs without another word, or without surprising the friend who had done so much to raise him to his present intellectual condition. But Mr. Graydon watched him with breathless interest from where he stood, with dimmer and dimmer powers of vision, into the gloomy woodlands; for his own studies, and high capacity, made him comprehend, in a degree, the intensified joy which belongs to genius in its crea-

tive moments. For mere sense has no joy like it; earth can gift with no delight that bears comparison; wealth can bestow nothing in equality. No! genius, abstractedly, is a united power of love and beneficence, giving and blessing; and is therefore sovereign and supreme, because characteristic of Deity.

The morning had already advanced from misty dawn to the richest point of sunrise, when Oliver reached the town. The cathedral, which lay upon his way, had all its eastern front so richly appareled in this glory of the summer morn, as to leave not a pinnacle, a niche, a dusty cranny, else solitary and untouched, since centuries gone the builder wrought it, nor even the lightest feather or garment border tinted in the windows, unbeautified. Observant of this, the artisan stayed his feet, and gazed upwards for many minutes; more conscious, however, of a sensuous influence than an artistic one; for he knew not yet, what the coming age of art will recognize as its highest law, that art is not alone colour and line, and form, but a combination of all spiritual, moral, and physical influences which may have been brought into operation. Heretofore, through much of what has been named high art, the artist has seen only the canvas and landscape before him; by-and-by, the daily uprising and downlying, the food, the house, the habiliments, the moral rule, the self-respect, the love of friends, the hate of enemies, will all be seen as active in the creation of the picture or the statue. When once we recognize

this for the profound law it is, we shall see the way to a higher development of the true artist, whose power in placing on canvas, or fixing in stone, or erecting in iron, the result of a myriad generalizations, will be in proportion to their purity and worth; and who will then be able, as a true artist has beautifully said, to give "the storm of storms," the "sunshine of sunshines." This same law I see, too, will operate profoundly in morals and politics.

Thus, as the Lichfield artisan turned from the cathedral front, sensuously warmed by the sun, and gladdened by its extreme glory, he did not as yet know that every tint, and stone, and niche, and shaft and spandrel, had left an influence little subordinate to the grander one of the Bell-shaped Nebula, as to the Bronze Inkstand. He went onward to the outskirts of the town, and there, amidst scattered houses and bowery fields, he turned into a rustic garden of large size, bounded by meadows. This garden, encompassing widely both gables of the dwelling, formed itself immediately, in the rear of the house, into a sort of grassy lane, and this was more or less built up with wooden sheds and smithies, over which the shadowy trees of the garden drooped with picturesque effect. This effect was further aided by the great out-door anvil fixed to a monstrous block of stone, and by clumps of barked timber, and little heaps of old rusty, lichen-covered iron, scattered up and down. It was just that sort of place in which one could well fancy

wrought those artisans of the Middle Ages, who in Augsburg and Nuremberg, and subsequently in the Low Countries, achieved such marvels in iron, in bronze and Damascene work.

After depositing his bundle in one of the workshops, Oliver entered the house by a door quaintly set in a low porch of stonework, with a wooden bench on either side, over which were nailed curious little fragments of old iron. To his surprise, instead of the disorder he expected, and had been so long accustomed to witness when old John had had a drinking fit, everything in the old kitchen was at rights and scrupulously clean; the fire laid ready with sticks to light, the kettle by the side, and on a truckle-bed in a corner of the room (for the chambers upstairs had been long dismantled, and were wholly unoccupied, with the exception of one lately furnished and used by himself) the old blacksmith lay asleep, but with traces too deep of the over-night's debauch upon his hectic face to be mistaken by one who knew him as well as Oliver. Instead, however, of rudely awakening him, or looking down in anger and vindictiveness, the young man smoothed back the sleeper's grizzled hair, and passed his hand more than once over a skull that even, in this decline of life, was magnificent, in a way expressive of the utmost pity and filial tenderness. He then stole from the bed, lighted the fire, swung the kettle, and went upstairs to his room to shave and wash, and put on his working dress, though even this was decent and cleanly;

for, as Mr. Coggs had truly said, Thornway was known in Lichfield as the "gentleman artisan," a pleasant reproach that artisans will, as a majority, both deserve and be proud of by-and-by. His first glance, as he entered his solitary chamber, was towards a narrow shelf on which he kept such books as self-denying economy, or the generosity of Mr. Graydon, had made his; and there certainly was the loss he dreaded, those books of Flaxman's designs for Homer's "Iliad" and "Odyssey," and for the Shield of Achilles, which, during a year he had wrought in Birmingham, and attended there the School of Design, he had bought out of the savings of a severe self-denial, and, over which, seeing for whose sake it was, Art might have wept. Abstracted as his mood was at the time, labouring as his soul was at the details of a genuine creation—for genius has to do all this world-work, in spite of its prerogative—intense pain and indignation were his first feelings. But subduing these, by the generous recollection of old John Newport's worth and genuine humanity, and blameless life in all other things, excepting in this sin, that thus had robbed him, Oliver resolved not to mention the loss, or make one reproach, but steadily pursuing his own course of labour and duty, again be master of those matchless outlines of,

"Atrides' weighty shield, that round about him cast
 Defensive shadows; whilst ten bright zones of gold affecting
 brass
 Were driven about it;"

and himself walk in the light of art, and be the new Flaxman of a newer age. And could it not be so?—could not England have her Nurembergs and Augsburgs, and could there not be set forth, in bronze and steel, designs typical of Peace, as those of War and Human Misery!

He was consoled by this stern renewal of older resolutions, and going downstairs breakfasted quickly, and mending the fire and leaving the meal ready for the old man if he should awake, he hastened to one of the smithies to perform the neglected work of the day before. But again to his surprise he found it nearly completed, which showed that old John must have worked far into the afternoon; so soon finishing the quaint cathedral lock with the strips of brass he had bought at M'Clure's, he began such rougher work of the day as might leave him more at liberty to mentally work out the design, in detail, which an inspiration had unfolded. But, nervously as he plied bellows and hammer and file, deep as the roar was, sharp and huge as were the ringing strokes, and sweet as, in the longer and lesser pause of these, came the light rustle of the garden boughs, the chirps and twitterings of the birds, and the low silvery trickle of a spring in the adjacent meadow croft, nothing could be more slow or laborious than this work of the brain.

About noon, and soon after his return from finding that old John still slept, he heard a footstep in the grassy lane, and in an instant after old

Samuel the verger leant over the smithy hatch, and, unlatching it, came in.

"God bless thee, Oliver!" he said, with much emotion, as he grasped the artisan's hand, "I thank thee—I thank thee!"

Oliver was immensely surprised, both at these words and at the old man's visit; for this was the first time, to Oliver's knowledge, since he had been with John Newport, now a space of eight years, that the grave old verger had touched his brother's threshold.

"I thank thee, Oliver Thornway," he continued, fervently, "for what thou hast done towards raising old John from the dust; and though Lichfield folks had said much about thee and thy doings, I knew them not in a portion of their worth till last night."

Oliver was still more surprised, but seeing the old man was deeply moved, he allowed him to proceed.

"You know full well, how for nearly nine years, in regard to my place, and the decent fame so long kept in Lichfield by the old name of Newport, I have held aloof and been over stiff-necked in respect to John—maybe this doing not all mine—oh, no! I have been brought a bit to the dust myself of late—but as I was saying, I was still stiff-necked, and like a Moabite, till coming up the street with Doll last night, we found old John amidst a rabble of boys and men, who were insulting and taunting him with his sin o' drunkenness. I could not bear this sight, or Doll's tears—

for you see, Oliver, the girl has always loved her uncle, and taken after him a deal ; so with the help o' Jones the constable, and a neighbour or two, we cleared away the mob and helped him indoors. And then, sore as my heart was to see John fall down insensible, and be the battered, filthy wretch he was, I couldn't but at a glance see what thou hadst been ; ay, and this more, when they found tidy clothes in the drawer, and a meal in the closet, for in the hour I'd left him (stiff-necked, I say), not a morsel of food was in the house, scarcely an article of furniture was left, and not a live cinder lay on the hearth. Yes, Oliver, I said to myself, if a stranger has stepped in and done this for the old man, I, his brother, must stand aside no longer, as though strong in the light of my own righteousness."

"Thank you, thank you for this wise and good resolve," spoke Oliver, as he grasped the meek old verger's hands in his, "if anything can come in good time to make John a conqueror yet, it's your regard. But there is a mystery in this affair, Samuel, which I cannot unravel. Old John was as sober when I left him in the morning as I am now, and he must have been so till far into the afternoon, by the work I found done this morning on my return. Besides, he had solemnly promised me not to stir out of doors ; and, to prevent all need of his doing so, I had spent the very last shilling in the house in purchasing all the necessaries he was likely to need, and that was why I had to toil on foot to Birmingham. Therefore that

some one came and lured him from the smithy here, I am sure. And so, Samuel, answer me one question, in the new and friendly spirit that is to be ours : Is it these Coggses, think you, that have done this—for they are great friends of your wife ? ”

“Maybe, Oliver, may be,” replied the old man, deprecatingly, as he partly hid his face from the young man’s gaze in his uplifted hands, “ nothing comes amiss to them, nothing ; as I say, I’ve been punished for my stiff-neckedness.” He displayed, in saying these latter words, an amount of mental agony which was startling to behold.

“This is not well, Samuel,” spoke Oliver kindly, “ particularly when the very wisest of us are liable to mistakes in our estimation of character. Though yours is more than a common mistake, I fancy—for I fear to your wife, more than to old John’s habits of dissipation, is owing this bitter estrangement.”

“It is, lad,” replied the old man, contritely, “ though I mustn’t cast the whole burthen on another’s shoulders. But, ye see, I was deceived by having had, up to that time, plain and honest natures to deal with. Yes, Mr. Oliver, Sarah’s brother was a friend of mine, and going to and fro to the village where he lived, through those few sad years which followed Doll’s mother’s death—for he was a schoolmaster, and a great lover of church music, like myself—I saw this woman, then many years a widow, and who

boarded and lodged with her brother. Well, she pretended to take mightily to Doll, and said she loved her like a mother; and so, things going on in this way, all at once this woman and her son came to Lichfield, and, without leave-asking, settled themselves in my house. I do not know how it was, for the idea of marrying again had never once entered my mind; but I *was* married, and quickly too, for all that. The way was this: she had the banns put up, and bought the ring, and then, over night of the wedding-day, said, 'Come, Samuel, you and I must go and get married in the morning;' and I obeyed, I fancy more out of fear than anything else, though I could recollect nought that I'd ever said to her of marriage, or giving in marriage. Well, time went on, and her true nature came out more and more, year-by-year. She had some little money of her own; this she kept for herself, and got from me, saying she would replace it, a hundred pounds, which I had been saving in the county bank for Doll ever since she lay in the cradle. This sum was used in apprenticing Sarah's son, Joe Martin, to a London silk-mercier, as country folks and country shops wouldn't do for Sarah's pride. No! Joe must go to London, and be a gentleman. What he did there, or why his west-end master threw up his indentures, was never told to me, though I fancy he did sorely ill, by the money my wife has had to pay, from time to time, for him; for as I was told by her own brother, the other day, the little farm her former husband left her has been,

within late years, mortgaged to its last shilling. Well, in a while I heard of Joe being in Birmingham——”

“Yes,” interrupted Oliver, “he was there, and, for a time, in a flashy linendraper’s shop, during the year I worked in Mordaunt’s smelting-house, and he bore ——”

“Out with it!” exclaimed the old man, fiercely, for one so humble and meekly quaint in his behaviour; “a bad character! Oh, yes! my vain self-righteousness has been brought low. Well, Oliver, now, for six weeks, this young man, under pretence of serving in Coggs’s shop, has been living in our old cottage; and if it wasn’t for Doll—sweet child—my old psalmody, and older books, and, holiest of all, my daily service pacing up and down, I should wish myself colder than the cathedral stones I tread.” He said this, and, leaning down upon the anvil, wept like a child.

But Oliver soon soothed his peace-loving heart again. “Come,” he said, “brighter days will yet shine for the honest name of Newport; and to help towards these you must come up and down, Samuel, and be a brother once more to John. You must bring Doll—you must let her cleave to him——”

“She has his heart,” interrupted the verger.

“You must bring your violin, for old John has the Newport love for music.”

“Ay,” again interrupted the clerkly old man, with a sweet enthusiasm, in which was quaintly blended paternal and maternal love, touched by

the pious simpleness of a Herbert or a Doddridge. "Doll has a sweet voice, and a true ear, and I myself have given her some few lessons in the gamut; so she shall come, and John shall hear her."

"And thus you may help the stern battle of life within these walls, and be comforted yourself," continued the young man; "now let us go into the house, and, joining hands, be you and old John once more brothers."

So saying, Oliver led the way from the smithy to the house; but they were arrested on the threshold of the kitchen by finding that old John had risen, and now sitting either on the bed or by the fire, was partly praying for strength against future sin, and partly using words of self-reproach, with a remorseless self-infliction that could only be exceeded by the self-flagellations of an ancient hermit.

"Beast! fool! sot!" he repeated, more than once; and then, as his vehemence exhausted itself, he prayed with a touching, imploring meekness, which bespoke its own sincerity, that he might yet be good to his "blessed lad Oliver."

"I cannot go in—I cannot see him now!" half wept the meek-hearted old verger; "I should be a worse child then; so, go thee in, and speak to him alone, and I will come, after afternoon service, and let Doll brighten up the hearth, and make tea." The verger crept away, and Oliver went in gently. The old man sat by the fire, and his head was bowed down on the table yet spread with his untasted breakfast.

He heard Oliver's footsteps, and cowering down like a beaten dog, raised up his hands as if for mercy.

"I cannot look at thee, my lad!" he said, "I cannot look at thee! I ain't worthy a bit more of thy goodness, my boy."

"Father," said Oliver, as he stooped above the old man, with womanly tenderness, "you have done wrong, but I forgive you; and, therefore, not another word of self-reproach, because it only adds to my exceeding pain. Come, even *I* will strive to make this your last error." As the young man took old John's hand in his, he found it fevered, and his eyes, as he raised them, blood-shot. "Why, you are ill!" he continued instantly, with a trepidation which betrayed how earnest was his affection.

"Ay! lad, ay! I feel bad enough; never a drop before—and it was but a little—touched me this ways."

Oliver had it at his heart, and on his lips, to ask the old man all concerning what had thus so strangely happened; but recollecting his own noble resolve, and the pain it gives to those in error to open up its source, he refrained; and making the old man recline in his chair, he boiled fresh water, made some tea, and whilst old John slaked with it his feverish thirst, he sat quietly down by his side, and recounted all that had occurred since he had left him early the day before.

The old man listened with a patient, silent submission that was touching to behold, though Oli-

ver well knew how active his thoughts were at the moment, and towards which point they were at once strongly turned. This soon showed itself; for though, as Oliver went on, he made no comment other than as related to his niece and his brother Samuel, no sooner had the young man ceased speaking than he recurred to the subject of the Inkstand, with an enthusiasm which bespoke the intensity of his interest.

"My lad," he said, as he folded the young man's hand within his own hand, as a mother would that of a cherished infant, "thee 'lt do it, for thee hast a brave brain, and wilt live to do a sight of justice to the nature that I saw was in thee the night thy little casts in clay were shown to me by Bill Dicks, the Ketley forgerman. But thee must work out all thy meaning with patient thought; the idea must be wrought out in the brain, as good-welded iron must be on the anvil; and thee must have thy eyes open, too, to many other things about thee. Nature helps nature, as I have always found. When gentlemen have said to me sometimes, 'Newport, what makes thy work so unlike the common sort?' I've answered, 'I hardly know, gentlemen, except it be having my eyes pretty open to most things;' and this thee must have, my boy, and many things will come to help what is in thy head. One other thing, too, 'll be needed—the design, the cast, and the running, as well as the after-finish, must be done in our own smithy, and by our own hands. And we must make a secret of the whole."

"I have already thought of this," replied Oliver, "though the cost will be more than if I took the cast to Birmingham, and had the metal run there; but if I did this, the design would be pirated in a week, without any of that after-finish I intend, and which will constitute its chief beauty. As for secrecy—that is, indeed, needful."

"Well, my boy," spoke the old man weakly, "I am not garrulous, and none but Doll and her father will be up and down. Besides, thee can have the shed nearest the two great plum-trees, and which Doll and I will clear of garden seeds, and them sort of things, and set right—" He paused a moment, and then said, contritely, as though speaking of a need of his own causing: "But there'll be the metal, Oliver—and our poverty is sore, unless M'Clure—or Mr. Graydon—"

"No no," interrupted Oliver, quickly, with much of that natural characteristic sternness which was always so powerful in its influence over the old man at his side; "not a further word of Mr. Graydon in such a matter; for recollect how often he has been your friend—and mine as well—though not in a pecuniary sense. No, I would rather labour at anvil and in a smithy all my days than not work out this design single-handed; and as for M'Clure, I do not think his worldly wife would let him give credit to needy people like ourselves in such a matter. But all this we must leave to its own good time. Now rest in your chair, as I have yet to get my dinner, and fit

the lock in the transept door before it grows dark."

Saying this, Oliver took such dinner as their poor closet afforded, cleared away its fragments, set the old kitchen to rights, and made the hearth bright and clean; for, with the exception of washing, the whole of their household labour was performed by himself, and with a tidiness and dexterity that would have put to shame the majority of housewives. He left the old man in a quiet doze, and went forth to perform this needful work, which under ordinary circumstances would have been done by old Newport in person.

The streets were hot and dusty, for the meridian sun had fallen with great power, and therefore, as he stepped by a quaint, old cloistered door into the cathedral, its grand shadows and its solemn stillness affected him as they had never done before; and as he went onward into shadows still more grave and solemn, by the very reason that tinted windows flecked down here and there their gorgeous hues, in interlacing slips within these shadows, thought after thought of earth lifted, as it seemed, its burden and its consciousness from his soul, and genius grew religious in proportion as it grew fecund and sublime. This is ever so, for the world's law is that genius should consecrate herself to nature!

As the hour went on, and he sat at his handicraft in those grand shadows of arch and column, and his labour was silent, for the need of file and

hammer was for the time over, the glorious service of the afternoon began, and the low clerkly voice of supplicating man came through the distance richly to the ear ; then grander and louder the pealing organ, then still diviner and angel-wise the mellow voices of the choristers swelling or richly falling as the diapason needed. Then came the glorious "Magnificat," and the still diviner "Nunc dimittis servum tuum domine," "Lord, now dismiss thy servant," whose like, in grand beauty and religious poetry, no creed, no poet, no musician has yet surpassed or brought a likeness of. Then by-and-by the last note of the service was ended, old doors were swung and closed, and left their echoes to die away like a spent ocean wave—and all around, from niche and arch and cloister, deeper and deeper shadows fell!

All this time, as I have said, the creative faculty was again aroused, and the inspiration of the over-night again, and by degrees, stealing over him, it shone down into the inner depths of the soul, as a bright and heavenly moon looks down into the depths of a placid ocean. And now his labour being over, he paced far up and down, by tomb and cloister, and under lofty arch and tinted window, and all seemed like books spread out by Nature's hand, from which lessons might be read. The Bell-shaped Nebula had given the form, the gloom of the midnight woods, the breaking of the rosy-tinted dawn, the solemn and glorious-voiced organ, had all metaphysically served, as it were,

to round it, and shape it into beauty; and *now* these shifting shadows, some moving like the phantasmagoria of a kaleidoscope, or the reflection of sweeping clouds across a waving field of corn, wrought out ideas for its adornment.

At length he was aroused by the striking of the church clock, and made for the first time aware how night had stolen on, and how long he had lingered; so, gathering up his tools, and locking the cloistered door behind him with a key belonging to the verger, Oliver hurried homeward. When he reached it and opened the quaint old kitchen door, a scene met his gaze, though made up of plainer and simpler circumstances, that was not without its sweet effect upon the creative faculty. A candle was lighted, and at a table in the shadow of the wide chimney sat old John Newport, still in his quaint chair, his childlike niece upon his knee, occupied in some small task of needle-work, and by his side and before the table, simple and grave and clerklike as he always was, sat the verger Samuel, reading out of some one volume of a small library of books he had at home, a sermon from Tillotson, or Barrow, or Taylor, touching the Worth of Repentance. And he read well, and with a simple solemnity very pleasant to hearken to; for he had had a fair education, and been associated for the best part of his life with cultivated men.

As Dolly Newport sat there on her uncle's knee, her simple girlish appearance made even more so by the quaint garb of a church school to

which she belonged, few would have surmised the depth of her earnest character. Few knew of it, or perhaps observed it; for her father, in his odd way, still treated her as a child, and her mother-in-law, for obvious reasons, made her as much a cipher in the verger's household as she could; still, for all that, Dolly, though but fifteen, had the thought and feeling of a woman twice those years. It was curious to see how doubtful she was whether to act the part of a girl or woman when Oliver took her hand; and how, when she had had courage to look up and notice his grave and abstracted manner, it was given in her old frank childlike way, just as when coming by her uncle's garden she had often stopped, beside the gate, to speak and inquire after him.

It was clear that Oliver regarded her in no other light than a child; for after the few first words, he scarcely addressed her again, or seemed to notice her, though after her father had finished reading, she set forth the frugal supper, and, when partaken of, cleared it away. Some short while after this the verger fetched his old violin, and a music-book he had brought with him from an adjacent table, and playing the accompaniment of one of those old psalms of which, to a proverb, he was fond, Doll sang the words in a simple, earnest, though musician-like way, which not only bespoke cultivation, but also brought raining tears from the repentant drunkard's eyes.

"Ah! Doll," he said, at length, "if you'll come and sing a bit like that to me of evenings, I shall

grow strong against evil, I think, my dear."

"I'm sure I will, uncle, I love you so well."

"Ay, and thee must be good a bit, too, to Oliver, and you and I'll set the old place to rights, my Doll, so that my boy shall give us good characters."

"Oh, yes, uncle, I love you, and shall like to come. And I can do so many things—you scarcely know how many." She paused a minute, and then said again, quickly, "Uncle, you are very fond of flowers, ain't you?"

"Yes, my girl, no man likes a nicer garden than I do."

"Well, father telling me I should come with him this evening, I begged of a schoolfellow, and brought with me a bunch of very nice ones." As Doll spoke, she went and brought, from the old-fashioned window-ledge, a small but exquisite posy of our choicest English flowers.

"Why, my lass!" exclaimed old John, the instant he had put on his spectacles to gaze at it, "this is as if it was the very same nosegay Oliver got from Ryeton Manor, whilst he was drawing the scroll of his fender!—that it is."

Doll made no answer, nor even raised her face, though the old man kissed her, and expressed his thanks, as he took the flowers, and set them, with the pitcher which held them, on the table. As for Oliver, he might have been an effigy of stone in the cathedral aisle.

It was now time for them to go, which they did as soon as the old verger had packed up his

violin, and seen that Doll was as carefully sheltered in her little school-cloak, as a mountain shepherd sees that his weakest yeanling is housed in the fold.

When they were gone, and old John carefully tended to his bed, Oliver, who had exhibited some signs of impatience at the verger's lengthened stay, fetched such drawing materials as he needed ; and whilst his soul again renewed its inspiration, whilst the Bell-shaped Nebula still hung in heaven before him, whilst the organ still played on, and the far-up cathedral windows still cast their arabesque glory at his feet, he began his great design ; and, though he knew it not, that childish voice still singing onward to his rapt soul ; and before, and hovering over him, the hue and scent of flowers, to which his eyes were blind, helped—largely helped—this beginning of an immortal fancy of the mind.

Thus, whilst Genius began its labour and pursued its course through those doubts and difficulties which seem, as it were, to be a portion of its inheritance, Lord Clare and his daughter were quietly settled at Arden. Attached to the country and its pursuits, particularly to agriculture and its improvements, Lord Clare, like Walpole and Bolingbroke, seemed to renew life itself in the simple pleasures of his country home ; and after the morning's study—a statesman's duty that no leisure encroached upon—he was out abroad in the fields and woods with Bertha and Aurore. For three recesses, previous to the one spoken of,

he had been little at Arden, and he therefore enjoyed this period of simple, unostentatious repose with more than usual keenness. At length, the marriage of a distant relative made it necessary that he and Aurore should take a short journey to the south of England, and this alone; for Bertha, who had been an invalid for a week, begged, rather than a visit to a house of grandeur and festivity, a few days of entire leisure and repose; and as this wish coincided with that of the grave old country doctor, whose favourite patient Bertha was, Lord Clare at last consented to leave her at Arden alone. On the morning of his and Aurore's departure, he accompanied his daughter to take leave of her, as this was the first time for several days that Bertha had left her sleeping chamber. They found her in her favourite room, a sort of study, fitted up entirely by herself, and possessing a collection of books that a professor of moral and social science might have envied, and seated in the favourite recess of an old bay window, which formed a small room in itself. A small library table, spread with writings, books, and unopened letters, stood beside her, but she rose to receive Lord Clare and to draw Aurore to her side for the fourth or fifth time that morning. When the first kindly greetings were over, Lord Clare smiled, as pressing his hand down upon the table, he said,

“Strangers would think, Miss Westall, that Arden was the refuge of more statesmen than one.”

"Scarcely this, my lord; letters, like strangers, must wait on illness," answered Bertha.

"But certain books do not," he said, as taking the — Review off the table he showed to Aurore its already cut and marginal noted leaves; "why, you are before me even in possession, for my copy only came by last night's post. But I employed the whole evening over it, after Aurore had left, and found it an admirable number. The article on Astronomy, in connection with design, is masterly in the extreme. I have been trying to guess the writer, and wonder if I'm right."

Bertha, taken unawares through indisposition, and less self-possessed than usual, blushed deeply, and made no answer.

"I am right in my guess, then? Still few would know your style, terse as it always is. Here the calculations and the unbounded fertility of illustration led me astray. Usually you keep the more abstract side of questions in view."

"Well, Lord Clare, your guess is right, though I would have fain hidden the authorship from you; for I have spoken boldly. With respect to its more popular style, I want it to be both read and understood by many, particularly by two classes, those who control the artistic institutions of this country, and that much larger class to whom new developments of art open new sources of production. I want all this immense class emphatically to understand the boundless resources of nature, and how schools, and manners, and forms have hitherto limited what is limitless. I

want the artisan classes to be more open-eyed to beauty, and to understand that many of the exact sciences, which may be taught to them in their People's Colleges and Literary Institutes, or which they may follow out in the harder path of self-learning, abound with suggestive hints of priceless value; and this is why I would open up Astronomy as a new resource of form for the artist."

"True," replied Lord Clare, "but it is only the highly gifted who can gather in the points of a wide generality to an effective result. But this subject of astronomy brings to my mind something Sir John Vernon was telling me a few days since."

"What," said Bertha, "that here in Warwickshire we have a fine astronomer, and a telescope almost equal to Lord Rosse's. Yes, Mr. Matlock, the doctor, has been surprising me with all these details."

"Well," added Lord Clare, "Graydon used to visit here when a boy, and on one or two occasions since then we have met, and in a most cordial spirit, though he declines visitors and visiting. Still, as I understood from Sir John that the tower in Ryeton Woods has been thrown open to visitors, for the next few weeks, you might go there and see the great telescope. Graydon is a noble man, and you can mention my personal respect for him, in such terms as you find best. I will even call on my return home, if you find my visit would not be intrusive."

"With pleasure I will obey," said Bertha, ear-

nestly, "for I have long known Mr. Graydon by name, both from the literati interested in these subjects, and from his contributions to the Transactions of the Royal Society, as one doing much for science, though unpretendingly. I will take a drive to Ryeton Tower, and even if it be closed against me—as I think I understood from Mr. Matlock yesterday it is again to general visitors—the rich beauty of those fine woods, and a view from Ryeton rock on to the valley, will well repay me."

"By all means do this," spoke Lord Clare, "and this as early as you can, so that I and Aurore may have a full account. Now we must say good-bye."

So saying, Lord Clare and his daughter took their leave, the young girl clinging to her "dearest mamma," as she so often called Bertha, to the last moment, with tender affection. In a few minutes more Bertha had watched them into the thick shadows of the woodland road across the park, and then returning to her books and papers, a serene and indescribable peace seemed like a brooding dove to hover over and settle down upon her soul. For her noble, honest heart would call to mind few duties unfulfilled; and if even graven on it was one sorrow, less and less had it latterly become, for with that sublime prerogative of truth which is its own, science had taught her that even stars of magnitude and brightness wait often centuries for the approach of their own parallelism. And so, perhaps, spirit like matter may obey the

same laws, though the length of a human life stands in the place of centuries.

Two mornings after Lord Clare and Aurore's departure, and not before she had had a letter from Aurore urging the visit as a circumstance in which both herself and Lord Clare took much interest, Bertha set out in an open carriage to Ryeton. It was just at that season when Autumn is in its richest glory, and when the sun, even at full meridian, betrays the waning year with an opaque effect, which several of the great masters of the English school have been so successful in casting down upon their landscapes. All through Arden park and woods, the way was one scene of extreme beauty; then came heathy lanes and a wide stretch of moorland, and after this the carriage began to ascend into the gloom of Ryeton woods. By-and-bye these suddenly opened themselves into a park of small extent, in a hollow of which lay Ryeton Grange, an old, grey, stone building, with many gables, twisted chimneys and turrets, and with an old wooden belfry, in which the gazing traveller could see the bell, but still a house of ample comfort and size, and set in a garden of such exquisite beauty and picturesqueness as with its autumnal tints to glow against the dark masses of the encroaching woods. The carriage had been stayed for Bertha to behold this scene, and now proceeding once more into the sylvan gloom of the ascending woods, along a rough roadway of boulder stones, with swift rivulets crossing it with a gurgle or a roar as they lost

themselves in the opposite waters or amidst the rocks, nothing could exceed the singular effect of the sweeping masses of foliage, as now and then patches of sunlight came breaking in upon them through the shadows. And these masses were sometimes so dense as to sweep across the carriage seat, and leave behind them the ripened russet treasures of hazel, beech, and chestnut trees. At last, the woods opening, Bertha beheld the tower before her, and the sweet old garden stretched around the homestead. After viewing the splendid scene of river and valley from the mossied point of scarp rock on which the tower was built, the attending servant rung the bell of a quaint porch half-hidden by one side of an ivied gable, and old Letty appeared in clean apron and primitive cap. Mr. Graydon, she said, was at the Hall, but Mr. Maskell was in the observatory, and she was sure the lady could see what little there was to see by day. Whilst therefore she took up her name and wishes to the chaplain, Letty left Bertha in an old-fashioned parlour, looking out on to such a strange wooded nook of the garden, as to make easy the fancy of a troop of satyrs peeping out from jagged boughs and from between the mossy stones. And then the room itself drew a smile from her: to see that loving hearts, though most unscientific tastes, had, making this old room a hospital for the discarded instruments of the observatory, heaped them together, and turned them to such account, in the way of ornament, as to look like a burlesque on astronomy. But the old dame's

best spinning wheel, and old David's gun and carefully preserved boxing-gloves, bespoke whose simple taste it was that turned old telescopes, sextants, and compasses to such new uses.

Old Letty soon returned with a brief message, and led the way up into the large room in which Oliver had seen Mr. Graydon. Here the effect by day was even nobler than by night, as the strong light fully revealed its wealth of books and instruments; and Bertha, though used to splendid rooms, and much of that beauty that money can procure, stayed irresistibly her step, as Oliver had his, as a first view of this room opened itself before her. In an instant the venerable chaplain had risen from the table and welcomed her, for at once he recollected having met her on several occasions in the cottages of the neighbouring peasantry; though her name, as it had been announced in Letty's country phraseology, was unknown to him. After the first few minutes' conversation, they talked onward with the ease of friends; for both were interested in one object, though the grave old man—learning evidently much that was new to him—was by far the greater listener.

“What you tell me, Madam,” he said at length, “profoundly interests me, for our labours here are much too abstract and rigid for us to be very cognizant of the developed relations of science with daily life; though in respect to this, I fancy, I can tell you something that may surprise you, perhaps largely so. In Lichfield, at this very moment,

is an artisan placing in *form*, as it were, a result of the severer science you would make accessible to art."

"Indeed," said Bertha, earnestly, "you delight, but scarcely surprise me; for I know full well that a discovery, an idea, or even a generalization from known facts, is more often the product of an age and its social condition than of a single mind distinctly considered as such; though one mind, more advanced than others, may be the first to give it a vital shape. Thus it is that I, in wishing to see Art draw towards herself the new and limitless resources of science, and the artist, in giving form to a result so drawn, from a wider gaze into nature, but unfold one and the same idea — an idea simultaneously impressed upon us by the same operating influences of time, social progress, and intellectual condition. For this reason we usually find many claimants to one discovery; for the same causes which have led in one form to the power of creation, give in a wider radius the lesser power of receiving what is so created; and this law operates the more we make advance."

"Well, madam," replied the chaplain, "though for some considerable period both myself and Mr. Graydon took great pains in assisting the earnest self-labours of this remarkable young man, the idea that astronomy might be suggestive of forms to art is one purely his own; and it was only a few weeks since that he was here to see the Bell-shaped Nebula, by aid of the great telescope and

its reflectors, for some purpose connected with design, I think; if I recollect rightly what Mr. Graydon said, it was the cast for a Bronze Inkstand."

Now thoroughly surprised and interested, Bertha asked the old chaplain many questions, and he not unwillingly answered them, so she soon possessed such information concerning Thornway as was known to Mr. Maskell: of his coming as a lad to work at the tower with old John Newport, and of Mr. Graydon's interest and subsequent kindness.

"Under any circumstances," said Bertha, "I should be interested in one who thus goes back to nature for inspiration, but, in connection with this particular design for an inkstand, singularly so; not simply because Lord Clare is at this very moment most desirous of some noble design, subservient to this purpose, but also because a great original production from a hand such as Thornway's would give Lord Clare's daughter a much needed and most useful lesson, and one which, I am sure, would act profoundly on a generous nature like her own. For at present her reasoning is this—'Why should so much be said and done for art, and towards the artistic knowledge of the artisan class, when this class gives no sign of creative power?' But let me show her the creative power in an eminent degree, let me lead her through that to the perception of who are the true artists of Birmingham and Sheffield, let me have it in my power to show her that out of the common

soil springs eternally the mightiest verdure of the earth, and I am certain that from that moment I shall give an important and earnest direction to warm and generous sympathies, hitherto misdirected on this and other points by a certain class of narrow-minded and proud relatives. If I can only humble this arrogance of self-opinion, I shall do much, but much more if I can turn into the current of Lord Clare's reasoning and well-known tastes the ability and zeal of his young daughter. But I must go to Lichfield and see this young man; for I seem as if I had an irresistible impulse to make myself his friend. If I should drive to Lichfield to-morrow, in what part of the town does he live?"

"You will find Thornway," replied the chaplain, "too reserved and self-reliant in character to pay much attention to a friendship of to-day; yet go—his is a character worth your study. As for his place of dwelling, I can scarcely inform you; but old John Newport has a brother a vergier in the cathedral, who, living hard by, will give you the needful information."

The conversation now turned upon more general subjects, and from these again into scientific details, of so interesting a kind, to those immediately concerned, that the short autumn day was declining when Bertha rose to take leave. But the good old chaplain would not permit her to depart till she had had some refreshment; and therefore, whilst Letty set forth luncheon in the quaint old parlour below, Bertha ascended to

view the observatory. From this, in a while, they descended, deeply conversing; and after the slight meal was over, and whilst the carriage was preparing, Mr. Maskell and his visitor strolled out to the foot of the tower, and standing on the soft sward of the precipice's edge, watched the sweet calm evening sink down upon the valley. Here the good old man, already half confidential with Bertha, resumed a conversation which their descent from the observatory had interrupted.

"From what I was saying, Miss Westall," he continued, "in relation to Mr. Graydon, you must not conclude that he is a hypochondriac, or follows science with other than a true and ardent zeal. But there are moments when even the wisest and most earnest slacken heart and hand, when even the very studies which ordinarily make up the blessing and joy of life lose their power, and the spirit, as it were, even under a condition of distaste and profound weariness, seeks for that, however blindly, which can give back the old sense of enjoyment, and that relation to nature which it has lost. This seeking of the spirit I cannot otherwise define than that the human soul craves always to draw from the sympathy of a kindred spirit that vitality it is conscious labour and solitude have deprived it of. This is the precise case with Mr. Graydon: for weeks, nay, often for months together, he will carry onward the most abstract and continuous studies, with a zeal more characteristic of youth than middle life; and then will come those deep fits of despondency

I have mentioned—this soul seeking after soul, as though for a renewal of itself—this indescribable state of mental doubt and self-distrust, from which few students perhaps altogether escape. But in Mr. Graydon's instance this state of mind assumes a singular form——”

“And one,” interrupted Bertha, with a smile, “that physicians would make no mystery of, by tracing the effect from its cause at a glance; but I scarcely should be so sanguine as they. For though referable in a large degree to bodily condition, I should say it was not wholly so; for there is much in this intense soul-seeking which I have felt myself, and yet cannot define; and the only illustration I can give of this mental condition is drawn from the severe science that has this day occupied our attention, namely, a star or planet imperfect in its affective action till it has encountered the parallelism of itself.”

For some minutes the old man made no answer, but looked keenly and with interest upon the earnest woman's face, which, so full of thought, gazed down upon the peaceful scene of nature at their feet, and then said, in a low voice, and with an emotion that at once riveted the attention of his listener—“May I speak in confidence?”

He waited for no answer, for one glance of the honest truthful face, now turned towards his own, was in itself the noblest of affirmatives; but continued, though in a still more subdued voice—“Your idea that body is not alone concerned, as the cause of these often inexplicable states of

mind, is in my idea perfectly correct, at least as regards Mr. Graydon. In his case there was a cause, which I will now confide to you. Some twenty years ago, and whilst he was young and at Oxford, he, in returning home one night from an adjacent college, met with what would seem a commonplace occurrence, but one which nevertheless profoundly and indescribably affected him from that moment to this. A London coach, passing through Oxford to a distant part of Western England, had stayed for a few minutes in one of the principal streets to change horses, and incidentally looking as he passed along the pavement, he saw inside the coach a face, which from sympathy with, or from some other unaccountable reason, he has never from that hour forgotten. It was that of a young girl, not more than fifteen, who leant couched asleep within the rough-coated arms of a middle-aged man, that from his dress and appearance was a seaman. He was a gentleman, and, by the likeness, evidently her father. For some moments the looker-on stood, as if by some unaccountable process rendered speechless and motionless, and was at last only roused from this state by the shouts of the hostlers, and the darting off of the fresh-horsed coach with the speed of the wind. His first impulse was to wildly follow it on foot, dressed even as he was in his student's gown; but he was checked, after running a street or two, by observing the looks of the passers-by. He then retraced his steps to the inn by which he had stood, to make inquiries, and

order a post-chaise to go in pursuit of the travellers, but this could not be immediately horsed, and when it was so much time had been lost as to render his purpose useless. However, on the following day, Mr. Graydon followed the coach to its destination, made many inquiries, and after a lapse of some weeks, even advertised, and sent his confidential servant here and there in all directions—but to no purpose, as the strangers had been met that same night at the branching off of a remote road by a gig, and therefore all clue of them was entirely lost. All that was ever learnt was that the seaman was on a brief leave of absence from his ship, and when seen was on his way, with his motherless daughter, to some relative, or to a school in a distant part of England. But though thus only seen once, the impression which that girlish face made upon that stern earnest student has never been effaced; he says he should know it again were it even in old age. It has tinctured his life with sadness, confirmed more his studious habits, and renews, as it were, its first power over him, whenever these deep fits of melancholy oppress him. It seems as if he sought a spirit like his own, and, as in the science which he cultivates, he feels sure that there exists some power in affinity with it, and yet can find it not, though the unity would be one productive of such large benefit. This is singular, is it not?"

The chaplain turned as he thus addressed his listener, and, somewhat to his surprise, saw her face

averted, gazing, as it were, on to a far part of the valley. When she did turn her face it was deadly pale, and saying in a low voice, and hurriedly, that he would find his noble confidence not misplaced, but that she could not then say more, as she felt slightly but suddenly indisposed, she raised her hand as a sign to the attending servant; in another moment she had said her brief adieu to the venerable old man, and entering the carriage, and sinking far back amidst its cushions, it rolled rapidly off into the now thickly-gathered gloom of the sweeping woods. And when thus once on her way, her face was not again raised out of the folds of the enveloping shawl till the carriage stayed before the portico of Arden Hall. Then quickly retiring to her own rooms, she dismissed her servant at an early hour, and sat far into the night, though neither pen nor book was touched or opened, but with her face pressed down upon her hands, and there upon the table, the past with its stern sorrows, and the future with its hopes and duties, grave and singular as these might be, filled her whole brain with thought.

Determined at once to see Oliver Thornway, Bertha set off to Lichfield on the morrow, and reached it by noon. Her intention had been to ask some of the choristers or officials of the cathedral as to where the old verger was to be seen; but the noon service being as she found just over, she bid the coachman drive into the adjacent street and make inquiries in some respectable shop. Obeying, and probably attracted

by the newness and brightness of the highly-gilt and large-sized canisters in the window, and the freshness of the paint outside it, the servant drove up to a small tea-shop, above which was painted in conspicuous characters, "Coggses Tea Establishment;" but returning, after a few minutes' absence, with an ambiguous answer, of which she could make nothing, Bertha herself alighted, and entered the shop. It was as new within as without; and, in the absence of customers, its two masters, or attendants, were severally reading a newspaper and smoking; the latter, who was no other than the travelling tea-man already referred to, leaning in a very free-and-easy way across the counter.

"Know old Sam, the verger?" said the smoker, partly repeating Bertha's simple question; "ay, that I do. The Newports be friends of mine, and likely to be something more, for the quaint old crab-tree has got a precious blossom on it. But I'm going there myself, and if you'll make company with me, Miss, you're welcome." All this was said with a consummate impudence it is impossible to describe.

"I thank you," replied Bertha, in a voice that to a degree abashed the man before her, as she at once retreated to the door, for his whole voice and manner filled her with inexpressible disgust; "but I simply require the name of the street, or court, where this old Mr. Newport lives."

"Beg pardon, Miss, beg pardon, I forgot that the bee and butterfly mustn't fly together, though going to the same flower. Beg pardon." And

then just briefly naming the court at the distance of a street or two, he turned rudely on his heel, put on his hat which stood on the counter, and began making up a small parcel, as if determined to follow when this was ready.

Bertha, after bidding the carriage wait, and making some further inquiries of a decent passer-by, was soon treading a line of quaint old shadowy courts, that led into one, close upon the cathedral, in which stood the verger's house. This, occupying one corner, was as shadowy and still, and grey, as if part of some monastic pile; and the short strip of garden seen on one side of it, the overhanging elm trees, and a low, arched door in the cathedral wall, added much to the quaintness and stillness of the place. Though she could hear voices, and angry voices too, within the house, Bertha rapped on the old grey door in vain; she therefore unlatched the upper portion, which went back as a shutter, and saw fully the interior of a large and old-fashioned kitchen, well lighted by a profusion of small lancet-shaped windows, without being herself for some moments seen. All that belonged to this old room bespoke of themselves, as it were, a calm and holy life led therein; for tall, dark leather-covered books were set about on oaken shelves, and some quaint old instruments of music, as a viol, flute, and violoncello, hung up in a niche of the wall; there was a high music-stand with two old brass church sconces nailed to it, an hour glass, and some antique blue china set forth in a three-cornered cupboard; whilst the furniture,

of all shapes, and quaintly carved, looked as old as the cathedral itself. But, otherwise, nothing bore out the serene and primitive aspect of the old place; for a woman, who might have been a low-class tavern-keeper, or something worse, sat in a wide chair, on one side a very large fire, considering that the season was yet warm; and opposite, sitting likewise in an easy chair, though a less capacious one, lolled a slip-shod, unwashed youth, of about twenty or twenty-two, smoking a long clay pipe; though his pallid face and blood-shot eyes bore the strong signs of an overnight's debauch. His whole aspect was that of one on the broad way to ruin, and his presence in that place of psalmody and old divinity was about as appropriate as that of a buffoon in the house of God. A cloth was spread for dinner, which the woman was cooking in a pan over the fire; a great jug of ale, a bottle of spirits, and a fruit pie stood on the table; whilst just a few paces off, dressed as if to go out, in a clean, short-sleeved frock and tippet, of that old-fashioned shape and aspect already spoken of, was Dolly Newport, bending down her face upon her hands, and weeping bitterly. Two pair of men's boots, of fashionable material and cut, lay at her feet, as if recently thrown there; and to these the sleepy, yawnish-looking fellow was pointing with his pipe, and commanding, with a ruffianism of voice and words which was quite in keeping with his whole appearance, the girl to clean immediately.

"I don't mind, when I come back, Joe, though

father doesn't like me doing this sort of work, as he has several times told you," said the girl; "but now I want to go to uncle's, you know I do, and this is why you like to torment me."

"You've got very fond of going there, eh?" leered the youth; "it isn't all 'Uncle John,' I fancy—it's that scoundrel the old drunken fellow harbours; a pretty thing that a person like that should eat up the old man's bread!"

"Joe," said the young girl, as she lifted up her face to speak, showing how the insult had touched her, by the intense blush which suffused her face, "you know as well as I do that Oliver is no pauper, and that but for his goodness and hard labour Uncle John would have been in a workhouse long ago; and as for my uncle being as he once was, you know he wouldn't have disgraced himself, as he did a while ago, if you hadn't got your friend Mr. Cogg's to entice him from the smithy as he did. You know as well as I do what a wicked plot that was!"

At these words the young fellow leaned back in his chair, and laughed immoderately, as if the joke were a very fine one, thus allowing the woman to turn round from the fire, and recommence her harsh invective.

"Before you stir, Miss," she called out, and pointing to the floor with a spoon in her hand, "my dear boy's boots shall be cleaned. He was born a gentleman, and he's got gentleman's blood in his veins, thank God, and that is more than you can say, you charity-taught beggar!"

"Mother, mother," entreated the child, as if her spirit was accustomed to quail before this woman, "please let me go this afternoon. Uncle said he should want me, and I got up early, as you know, this morning, to clean the house, and wash Joe's shirts, in order that you would let me go this afternoon."

"Eh! what do you say, what do you say?" interrupted the woman. "Do you mean to taunt me and my dear boy with lying an hour in our beds, when our health is what it is? But now I'll let you see——" She ceased here, and going rapidly round the table to strike the girl, her purpose was stayed by seeing Bertha, who, unhasping the latch of the lower door, now came quickly across the kitchen.

"You must not do this," she said, in that quiet voice of command which was habitual to her, and which was at once effective in staying the woman's vicious purpose, "for no good mother strikes her children——"

"Good!" interrupted the woman, with ferocity.

"I am a stranger, and therefore wholly unacquainted with your domestic history," continued Bertha, as calmly as if the woman had not interrupted her, "but you must, if you please, kindly spare your daughter——"

"Daughter—no daughter of mine, thank God."

"For I am come some distance to ask a question of Mr. Newport, the verger, and therefore she must be my guide into the cathedral."

Without waiting for the woman's affirmative or

negative, Bertha took the young girl by the hand, and led her, weeping as she was, at once out into the court, not stopping till she was across it, and beside the small, quaint, arched door, which opened, as she rightly imagined, into the cloisters of the cathedral. Here she stayed, and gently stooping down, almost for the first time saw, as she bid the young girl dry her tears, the youth and sweet beauty of Dolly's face. Intensely interested, even beyond the pity of the moment, Bertha spoke with still more womanly gentleness, but with no other effect than to make these small rivers of the soul flow forth with deeper meaning, as, mechanically unlatching the old door, the young girl went forward into the cool, grey shadows of the solemn cloisters. On they went into still deeper shadows, and towards a place as sequestered as if it led to some crypt or disused oratory, when just before them, at the turn of an arch, Miss Westall perceived an old man, robed in a rusty black gown, standing beside the shaft of the groined arch above, as motionless, as rigid, as pale, as unobservant as if carved out of the stone pillar itself. She abruptly checked her step, thinking, perhaps, she disturbed the devotional moments of some pious canon ; when at this, staying too, and looking forward, the young girl in another instant, with the audible word to Bertha's ear of "father," was with her face bent down upon the verger's pale, rigid hands, as if to hide within the dusky surplice her sobs, and still more passionate tears. Unwilling to intrude upon mutual sorrow, so holy

as that between father and child—for deep anguish, though more passive in its expression, had been intensely marked in the pale rigidity of the old man's face—Bertha drew back some paces, till beyond sight or hearing, and there, sitting down upon an old worn seat, fixed in a recess, she waited for some minutes, till their sorrow might be in a degree subdued. Fearful, at length, that they might think she had retired, she went once more forward, and found the old man seated on a stone seat, somewhat similar to the one she had just left, and Dolly kneeling at his feet, as passively as if the bitter tears she had shed had bereft her of all power to rise. But the old man, hearing approaching footsteps, rose at once, raising as he did so Dolly from her kneeling position. And with a simple ingenuousness, that suited well with the religious, confiding character of the old verger, Bertha at once stated her errand, and pleaded her interest in Oliver Thornway's history, as her excuse for intruding either on him, or, as she had done, on the privacy of his home. This last word opened all the floodgates of the old man's heart; and in a few minutes Bertha was almost as much acquainted with his history, his sore, domestic troubles, and the goodness of this, his only child Doll, as if she had been his friend for years.

“And she is going to her uncle's this very afternoon—for Doll has been of late in some degree his housekeeper, and will show you the way,” at length the old man said, as the tramp of the choristers' feet up into the organ-loft gave sign of

the approach of afternoon service, "and old John will be glad to oblige, in any way, a friend of Mr. Graydon's chaplain." As he thus went onward, to show the turn of the cloisters into a side aisle of the massive building, the good old verger, now somewhat restored to cheerfulness, and intent upon his duty, gave to Bertha's sight, for almost the first time since she had risen from her father's feet, a view of Doll's sweet face, and she was at once struck by the change which had come over it. No longer tearful or downcast, but full of eagerness, and earnestness, and interest, it looked like some spiritual face, embodying the three-fold aspect of love, and hope, and worship. Bertha could see nothing but this speaking countenance, as it went onward amidst the cloistral shadows; and when at last the old pale-faced verger left them, with poised rod and rustling, rusty gown, and the grand aisles and radiant windows lay before their steps, even then this countenance, so sweet, so guileless, and so bespeaking purity, shone loveliest beyond the loveliness of art—for it bespoke the spirit—the nearest thing to the Divine!

At length, beneath one of the finest windows, whose tints were rained down in matchless glory on the floor, Bertha suddenly stopped, and taking the young girl's hand, said, "This is a grand place, and your father seems to love it—does Mr. Thornway also?" In an instant she felt the young girl's hand vibrate in her own, like the strings of a touched instrument, as Dolly, with hesitation, answered, "Oh yes, ma'am, he has come very

often here of late, and some of the ornamental work of the great Inkstand has been copied from the shapes the sun casts down upon these floors." And as the young girl spoke, her face was the hue of the angel's vermilion robe in the window above.

By the earnest, eager face, by the trembling hand, by the suffused face and averted eyes, this true reader of the human heart knew that the young girl loved.

Not another word was spoken, till, after treading several streets, they stood together in a quaint old bowery garden, and heard the silvery ringing of the blacksmith's anvil.

When Miss Westall and Dolly Newport reached the doorway of the picturesque little smithy, they found only the old man at work beside the anvil; but so intent was he, and so thick and ringing came his strokes one upon another, as to prevent his seeing either his little niece or his visitor till Dolly, crossing to the anvil, clung to his swart uplifted arm, and spoke of Bertha and the object of her visit. In a moment more and he stood beside the threshold, and had addressed Bertha with much genuine old-fashioned courtesy; whilst she, struck by his fine humane countenance, was pleased to see in it a likeness to that of the verger, though in a stronger degree of sweetness, goodness, and half-poetic religiousness. You read at once truth and honesty in this good face, and felt certain that there was genius in this soul, and power in the hand of this man: for if gentle-

ness and piety had at once won her friendly regard in respect to the old verger, here equally so, and as instantly, did the stronger characteristics of the genuine old blacksmith.

"Bless you, ma'am, bless you," he said, heartily, though with a thick, choked voice, "the few that cross my threshold to speak well of my lad are like angels to me. But please walk forwards, ma'am, to the house, the old kitchen is a better place than this for thee to sit down in, though not what it ought to be" (he said this with a self-accusing voice, and then continued). "Doll, my dear, run in and dust my arm-chair for the lady."

"I thank you," said Bertha, "I can talk here as well as elsewhere, and shall find a seat, I'm sure. See here, the end of this old bench will do admirably, for I honour work too much to despise the workshop. And now, with the sincerity of a friend, tell me if I can, in any manner, serve Mr. Thornway—I do not mean in the way of patronage, I would not insult you or him by the offer of such a thing, but in the spirit of one who loves art for its own pure, exalted sake; and I have heard so much from Mr. Maskell, relating to the noble first idea of this bronze inkstand, as to make me be the one honoured in saying that Lord Clare will be its purchaser; for setting aside his ever ready patronage in all true art—and no man has a readier insight into real truth and genius than he—he will be additionally interested in this particular instance, if I have been right in

understanding that it was from some remarks dropped by Lord Clare's daughter, whilst sitting with me in the carriage before the door of the Royal Hotel, in Birmingham, that Mr. Thornway's attention was drawn to the design for an inkstand."

"You, you, you!" repeated the old man, with enthusiastic respect and wonder—"yes, of course it could be no other, for who else would come on such an errand, but the one who had spoken of art and the working-classes, as Oliver said he had never heard human creature speak before. They were words, as he said, that ought to burn into the heart of any true man, and give him power, as of a giant, to achieve great work. They urged him, as he said, as if by the sudden force of inspiration, to give a real shape to your bold advocacy of art and artisans. Oh, lady, how delighted and honoured, and proud my lad will be when he hears of this visit, and that when the Inkstand is finished you will at least look upon what a working man can do. Ah, he'll take over the Inkstand right proudly to Arden, I know, as has all along been his intention. But beyond this, and till then, I don't think your kindness could do much, for my lad is as proud in all that relates to his work, as he is of his good name; for sometimes when I have spoken to him about asking people's help, he has always stopped me by saying, 'A true worker, John Newport, will always clear his own path;' and I'm sure he's right, for he has a grand self-reliant spirit, though I have set him no exam-

ple, more the pity ! To you too, lady, I am sure he would wish to show this spirit in all its strong and earnest strength, for it is a part of my lad's nature to carry out a principle thoroughly."

"I meant no other than assistance given and received in a spirit of this sort," replied Bertha, gently. "All you have therefore to do is to tell Mr. Thornway of my visit to Ryeton, of my journey here, of my probable stay at Arden throughout the winter, and that when the Inkstand is finished, if he should like to bring it over there as proposed, Lord Clare will almost to a certainty be a purchaser. Though, if I could only know the day of his coming, I—"

"Name it, if you please," interrupted the old blacksmith, "and I am sure Oliver will finish the Inkstand by that day if he can. For the drawings are ready, the model half completed, so that in about two months from this time there would be certainty of its being done."

"As this is now the end of September," said Bertha, after a few minutes' consideration, "let us fix on the 2nd of December, for on that day, above all others, I should like to have the proud duty of placing a masterpiece of this kind before Lord Clare. Tell Mr. Thornway this; and before then, if I can in any way be his friend, remember my desire to serve him."

As she spoke, Bertha rose to go, for old John had at first told her that Oliver had that morning gone on some needful errand a few miles from the town, and might not be at home till nightfall ;

but just outside the threshold of the little smithy she stopped again, and asked somewhat hesitatingly — for the old man had made no proffer of the kind — if she might not see the drawings, or such portion of the model as was finished.

“I should not like to go against the will of my lad and show imperfect work, even if I could,” replied the old man, “for you see, ma’am, I ain’t in a manner to be trusted, because of the sore failing that has been my worst enemy through life, though, the Lord be praised, I have been doubly strong of late, since Dolly here has been round about me through the weak times of the day. The drawings are thus locked up, as I begged my boy to do this morning before he set off, so as not only to put at rest all doubt of my own infirmity, but to take care of a second accident ; for it seems we have thievish hands about us, and ears too that are open to all words about this fine thought of Oliver’s brave mind. Yes, it is a mystery to us, a sore trouble and vexation, but a first strip of the ornamental casting, of which we had made an experiment in the smithy here, was stolen the other night out of Oliver’s little working shed ; and whoever took it can sell it for a sum, for it came of one of the bravest of Oliver’s thoughts, as he trod up and down one of the cathedral aisles, and the clear moonlight threw down upon the floor the pale violet tints of an archangel’s robe in the high window above. This matter has been a trouble to us, particularly to me and Dolly

here. But at least you can see the little place where Oliver loves to work."

As he spoke thus, the old blacksmith went onward a few paces, and opening an old wooden door, half hidden in a profusion of jagged ivy, Bertha, to her surprise, saw before her one of the most artistic little workshops that fancy could bestow upon a grand and genuine artist. No monk of the Middle Ages, no craftsman of Augsburg or Nuremberg, no Munich sculptor of the present day, ever had or could desire a stiller or more quaintly garnished little workroom. It was the place the old man and Doll had set about and decked with loving hands, after the night the glorious idea of the inkstand had shone down into the soul of the artistic workman. With what effect the old timbered roof, and walls partly formed of unchiselled blocks of sandstone, and clumps of unbarked timber, could show; for on the ledges of the stone, or on nails on the rough points of the woodwork, were reared and hung, and placed, pieces of wrought ironwork, old locks and keys, and castings, carved wood, stained glass, and old china; whilst round upon the floor were crowded many things of the same kind, of no great value, perhaps, to the mere observer, but priceless to the artist. In the midst of all these things, stood a table formed of pieces of rough sawn wood, and on this, only just leaving room for the artist to draw or model, were littered small fragments of Damascene work; two or three old vases of common Roman workmanship; se-

veral old-fashioned, twisted flasks holding flowers ; and squatting down beneath these, like a censer on an altar, stood a well-known and remarkable lamp of old John's own workmanship, for which he had been offered many and many a time large sums, but which, as he now told Bertha, he had well saved through poverty and dissipation, "to shine upon the true work of his dear lad Oliver." Close beside this table ran a long case-ment, unglazed, but capable of being shuttered at will, and this, girt with a broad sweeping vine, and bowered in shading trees, looked far out into the garden, and far away to the brook-threaded croft beyond. Genius here might be still, and pray in the moments of its glory !

Bertha enthusiastically expressed her admiration of this sweet place to the old man.

"Nay, nay !" he answered, "the things are of no great price, and have come easy to one like me, who has travelled so much about the country repairing ancient ironwork and things of old date. Ay, if I'd had my eyes open, and done then as I do now, I might have had many costly things of this sort ; but it ain't too late to mend—and I may live to deck a brave place for my boy yet. But Doll has had a hand here too, ay, that she has, for I've nothing to do with many of the things that look so sweetly—no, not I, the flowers amongst them. But she's a sister to Oliver, and knows his likings, I think, better than I do."

The old man spoke these last words with such a spirit of simple belief, and drew the young girl

so proudly and fondly to his side, as to deepen Bertha's interest in regard to Dolly Newport still more; and when, a moment or two after, the old man went out to the garden palings, to see if Lord Clare's carriage had been sent forward as promised by the verger, she moved to the young girl's side, and, lifting up her drooping face with gentle hand, spoke with the tenderness of a friend.

"I fear you have an unhappy home by what I saw; but I hope, when I have seen and talked to Mr. Thornway, I may be able to do something to alter these circumstances—though before then, let me be your friend if you need one."

But whether it was from fear, or some sorrow of which the stranger knew nothing, no other answer came than that of tears, wept out as bitterly as those in the cloister of the cathedral; and it seemed a relief to her to hurry away towards the house, as soon as she heard her uncle returning, to show Bertha the path across the garden.

Either to avoid further conversation, or to make up for lost time, the old blacksmith, contenting himself with a crust of bread and cheese for dinner, returned to his work, and laboured on till the evening had fully set in, and the bright light from the kitchen window streamed out upon the shadows of the little roadway. He then left off, and going into the house found the old kitchen bright and clean, and tea ready. As his dinner had been such a scanty one, and Oliver's return uncertain, Dolly gave the old man his tea and

customary toast ; and when he began to look more cheerfully around—for a great shadow was over that poor household it was plain to see—she drew a stool to his feet and sat down there.

“Uncle,” she said, as she locked the old man’s hands in her own, and rested her uplifted face upon them, “do you think you did quite right in not telling the lady that came to-day the trouble which hangs over you and Oliver, about this inkstand ; and particularly now after this robbery of a portion of the ornamental design. I think it is, uncle, as if Providence had sent us a helping hand, which we have taken upon us to thrust aside.”

“This is what I thought, child—this is what I thought,” replied the old man, deprecatingly ; “but what could I do?—for Oliver’s anger would be so terrible if he thought I spoke of our poverty or troubles to a stranger. Oh, Doll, you should have seen his anger once when I asked Mr. Graydon a favour for him—oh, Doll, his sternness at such times makes me tremble like an infant. But I’ve a bit of hope, even if Oliver don’t bring home a penny of those old bills he has been to see after, for I have—I wrote,” the old man spoke here with humiliation and effort, “to M’Clure yesterday, and expect Tibbs, the carrier, will bring back the answer with him to-night.”

There was doubt and anxiety in the young girl’s face, though she had not time to reply, for at that moment a cart stayed in the street, and presently

a hand unlatched the door and held forth a letter. Dolly took it and brought it to her uncle, and was surprised like him, as he held it towards the candle, to see it directed in a weak, angular female hand, and sealed with the very unbusiness-like seal of a dove holding a heart.

"This is Rose M'Clure's writing," said Doll, as she watched the comical expression gathering on her uncle's face; "she has been to boarding-school at Bromwich, and is quite a lady I hear."

But old John, having adjusted his spectacles, made no reply, other than, as he read on, his expression of face grew still more comical, till at the end of the note or letter he burst forth into a loud, humorous laugh.

"Well, my dear," he said, "if you were to write such nonsense, though you called yourself a *lady*, I should be ashamed of you. Why, this letter, and the writer, would suit the Coggses to a T—eh! eh! This is too much for old plain John Newport, the blacksmith—but listen, my dear:—

"Miss M'Clure presents her compliments to John Newport, the blacksmith of Lichfield, and begs to say her pa can give no credit either to him or to the young man, in the way of brass, tin, lead, or antimony. Miss M'C. begs further to say that, being her pa's accountant and money manager, John Newport must send in the balance of his bill, or Miss M'C. and her respected ma will speak to Mr. Grindsharp, the lawyer, over the way.

“‘P.S.—Miss M‘C. begs to say that if Samuel Newport, the verger—a man in a respectable position and allied to the church—should like to be answerable for the debt, she will speak to her pa on the subject.’”

“Oh, oh, oh!” roared the old blacksmith, when he had ended, “if this comes o’ boarding-schools of Miss M‘Clure’s sort, let us keep you from one, my Doll. Why, Simon is softer than his own lead, to be thus in the leading-strings of his weak wife and silly daughter. But it is their doing—old Simon knows nothing of this; he has got too good a heart to insult poverty like mine, or genius such as that of my lad.” Old John still laughed, but Doll could see that the insult had deeply wounded him.

He was again holding up the letter to the candle, and proceeding to read it once more, when, in an instant, Dolly crushed it up within his hand, and pointed to the door.

“I hear Oliver,” she said, entreatingly, “so hide it, and don’t say one word, dear uncle, if you love me. Tell him about the lady here to-day, about the news for the inkstand; but do not burthen him with a new sorrow. And I will ask my father this very night to be answerable for the debt to M‘Clure.”

In a moment more, when Oliver came in, and across the little kitchen towards the fire, silent, thoughtful, and somewhat stern, as usual, and took his honoured place beside the good old man, how few would have imagined the depth of in-

tense affection, or the heroism capable of being exerted in his behalf, which lay latent in the heart of the little, trembling, silent, half-childlike creature at his side. Even old John seemed blind, though so all-seeing in most things concerning his "dear lad."

Whilst Oliver sat and took the tea which Doll so quietly poured out, and the old man roused up the fire, so that it might glow more cheerfully around the hearth, he spoke of his ill success in gathering together a little money, though so much was owing to them in the country districts he had visited.

"Well, never mind, my boy," said the old man, cheerfully, "things may mend yet; and something of luck turn up to-morrow, though it hasn't to-day."

"At least I hope," spoke Oliver quickly, as he looked fully in the old man's face, in that stern, penetrating way so much dreaded, "that you haven't been pleading in my behalf to anyone to-day, as if I were a beggar, without either skill or industry. You mean well, I know, John, but you will ruin me in the long run if you do these things. I told you that I wanted to keep this matter of the Inkstand quiet, and my poverty in respect to the materials needed for the casting; then why do you talk about it to others, or of luck, except it grow out of our own toil."

There was such truth and gentleness of manner in the old man's reply, as to at once tacitly reprove Oliver's pride and awakened suspicions.

"I haven't said a word to human creature, as Doll well knows; and as for the inkstand being a secret, it isn't, happily for you, to your best friends; for a lady from Arden Hall has been here to-day, to repeat much that she has heard from Mr. Maskell concerning you, as well as to bring the good news that Lord Clare will be a certain purchaser should your success prove only in a degree as eminent as the good chaplain is assured it will. And to make the thing truer, Oliver, and the matter more a wonder and surprise, it was the very lady whose words first suggested the Inkstand to you, and urged you to new exertions when your heart lay so dead within you from poverty and disappointment."

It was pleasant to see the joy, the pride, the surprise, with which Oliver heard the old man's words, not so much on account of the inkstand, or of its possibility of producing a sum that might raise that poor household from its struggling poverty, and give him new power to place his masterly designs before a class that could appreciate and judge, as that a woman, thinking as he thought, felt an interest in him, and that which his craftsman's hand might fashion, as Flaxman, Cellini, and Leonardo da Vinci did, for a time beyond their age—for an age in the hearts of men. For a little while the intense depression which had hung over him for days passed away, and he sat there with the joy of a child; then it returned in a tenfold degree, as the difficulties of

effecting the work came back, one by one, to his memory.

"Don't be sore-hearted and cast down, my dear Oliver," said the old man, as, obeying a look from Doll, he drew his chair nearer that of the young man, and took his pipe from the corner; "let us talk the matter quietly over whilst I smoke my pipe, and some plan or another will come to our mind, depend upon it. If it don't, lad, every scrap of the few old things we have shall go—that it shall."

Tea had been for some time finished, and Doll, having washed up and cleared away the things, put on her small grey cloak and bonnet, and came to the old man's side. "I'm going now, uncle, to see if my father has a fire, or has had his tea; and, Oliver, I shall be back by-and-by, so I won't say good-night." There was something so cheerful in the young girl's voice, something that so touched his soul with a sense of hope, and impressed upon him, as it were, a knowledge that a new era in his life was near, as to make him look up with surprise and kindness into her face, as he took her hand in his. In another moment she had hurried across the kitchen, with her eyes suffused with tears, though, as she closed the door, she heard her uncle say, "Well, I'm glad for thee to be kind to her, Oliver, for Doll loves thee like a sister."

Evening had fully set in, as she went quickly homeward through the streets. As she passed through that honoured by the Coggses' Tea Establishment, the conversation of a group of gossip-

ing women, occupying the pathway, drew her attention from thinking about her father and his journey to Birmingham, to the Coggses' parlour window, which, only curtained by a blind of muslin, and strongly lighted by both fire and candles, was the object of the women's comments. In the instant that she involuntarily lingered, she saw that Mr. Coggs had a party, and that her step-mother and Joe were of the number.

"A pretty sort of cap, of old Mrs. Newport's, with all that ribbon and flowers," said one woman to another.

"Ay, and old Samuel will have to pay for it," said another, "and a many other things he don't count on; for I hear she's getting dreadfully into debt; and this not for drink and clothes alone, but for eating things too, since that boy Joe's been back—more the pity for Doll and the old man—as nothing's good enough for the idle do-nothing. But I suppose they're going to make a night of it, for it is a sort of housewarming, I understand, as the young fellow is made a partner, and serves in the shop to-morrow for the first time. A pretty partner, indeed, with his drinking and gaming, and other things less honest—if what is said of his doings in London be true. But the Coggses, as my master says, are taking the old woman rarely in, and that she'll find, when her last sixpence is gone. Nor would it matter, if it wasn't for the honest old man and his good name."

Dolly heard no more, but, cold and sick at

heart, went onward mechanically to the old court. When she unlatched the house-door, not a spark of candle or fire-light was to be seen; so, after calling to her father in vain, she sought him in their little strip of secluded, half-monastic garden. And there, too sure, he sat on a little favourite stone-seat of his, but with dank brow and hair, and with hands as cold and rigid as the granite of the walls. She was startled by the immeasurable intensity of his despair when he did speak.

“Dearest, darling father,” she said, as she cleaved to the old man with a passionate tenderness which nothing could exceed, “please recollect the sweet old books you so often read, and their texts of comfort and sustaining faith. Please, please, be comforted; God is over us now as in our happier time; and you have me, and uncle, and Oliver. And comfort is coming, though you won’t think so, and won’t listen to me; for Oliver is sure now of selling the Inkstand when it is finished; and when he does so, as he said only a day or two ago, you and I shall go at once to Uncle John’s, as the few pounds the Inkstand may bring will enable them to keep a home for us.”

“No, no,” half wept the old man, “nothing is for us, Doll, but misery, ruin, and degradation—though I shouldn’t grieve a bit, shouldn’t care, if I only had to pay this price for my weak simplicity; but it is the thought of you, Doll—that I have robbed of a home and respectability—which is the worst grief of all.”

But the young girl would not listen to those

self-accusations, and by degrees so soothed the old man with her gentle and loving words, as to have power enough over him to lead him within doors from the chill dews of the night. Here, when she had struck a light, and it revealed the filthy disorder in which the woman and her son had thought proper to leave the old kitchen, his grief broke out afresh, and with even more intensity ; but, appearing not to heed it, Doll quietly lighted the fire, swung the tea-kettle, cleared away, as well as she was able, saucepan and gridiron, blacking-brushes and slippers, cap and gown, pipe and bottle, and going out and borrowing a little tea and sugar from a neighbour, soon had the small round tea-table by the hearth, and the old man in his chair. Light, and warmth, and food revived him, and made him in a while look up as if he were not quite desolate—as if his greatest blessing were yet left to him, whilst in innocence and loving goodness his child thus ministered to him and was by his side. He said so presently ; and with a meek devoutness strongly characteristic of the sweet, sterling piety of his nature, he prayed, even as he sat in his carved, high-backed chair, for power to fittingly reward his child.

“ And so you can, dearest father,” said Doll, as she came and leant beside the old man, so that her head rested on his shoulder, “ by being stronger in your faith, that out of evil good will surely come, and by really being firm in this matter of mother and Joe, instead of so simple and trusting, as Oliver says you are.” The old man asseverated

that he would, and Doll went on. "You can reward me, and make me very happy to-night if you will, father." She said this hesitatingly, tremblingly, as she half hid her face on the old man's shoulder. But he was too guileless to understand more than that she was in earnest, so, bidding her go on, she broke out to him, by degrees, the need that he should be so far Oliver's friend as to become answerable to M'Clure for such metal as might be needed in casting the Inkstand. To her great joy—though no more than what she knew he would do—he consented, with simple goodness, and, of his own accord, proposed that if, in the morning, an old friend would officiate for him, he would not lose an hour in going to Birmingham. Though in a degree suppressing her deep joy, which, left to itself, would have made her laugh and weep by turns, Dolly's caressing thanks were such as made the old verger lighter-hearted than he had been for months; and, as a proof of this to one who knew him well, he rose and fetched his violin; but instead of obeying this tacit sign that she would, as usual, take a part in such quaint old psalm or madrigal as might be fixed upon, she dressed herself, hurriedly, to go out again, much to the old man's surprise, when he looked round to show her the open book.

"You mustn't mind my going, father," she said, as if fearful of dissent, she at once crossed the kitchen and unlatched the door out into the court-way. "For this once I shall take no harm, and I will be back before you can play two pages through

—but Oliver and uncle must know your goodness, they must indeed.” She was gone before he could answer.

Never had Dolly Newport, light-footed as she was, trod the few old streets which lay between her home and uncle's house so rapidly. As she unlatched the wicket and crossed the fine old country garden, she saw in an instant how matters were disposed, for light shone through the partly unshuttered window of Oliver's little workshop and studio, and she knew by this that he was either at work or reading, and that her uncle, having smoked his pipe and supped, had gone to bed. Instantly her step slackened, and for a minute she hesitated whether she should return or go onward; but her desire to see him, to tell him that he need have no further fear as regarded M'Clure, prevailed over this first feeling of timidity; so proceeding, she went down the little grassy lane, and unlatched the door. Old John's treasured lamp was lighted, and some portions of the work connected with the Inkstand were on the table, but Oliver, though he had evidently been at work for a time, now sat so deeply considering some point or another, as to neither see the young girl, nor hear her quiet footstep. There she stood, awed by his earnest, almost stern expression of countenance, and trembling so with fear as to be neither capable of speaking nor stealing softly back upon her steps. At length her girlish sense of pleasure, at being the bringer of good news, prevailed over her more womanly sense of fear, and,

drawing close to his side, she touched his arm. He looked round quickly, angrily, and, like a sleeper awakened suddenly from a profound sleep, gazed, seemingly without seeing, as he said, "Well?" with the questioning voice of an autocrat. This word, though monosyllabic, turned her as it were to stone, for it implied a volume out of which she in an instant read, with self-torturing humility, her own lack of years, her childishness of manners, her little knowledge; and these in contrast with his stern self-command, his years, the genius which her old uncle predicted would prove so great, and his earnest love of knowledge which had already raised him so immeasurably above all those that were around her. This awakening to the presumption of her childish love and worship doubled thrice her awe and her humility. As he looked—stern as she fancied—she spoke, though with words half inaudible from the paralysis of fear, "I—I—I—Oliver—I only came to say that—that—father will be answerable to M'Clure—that you shan't wait—you shan't have a sorrow—that the inkstand can be finished." Though she was unconscious of the blessing and the joy, ears less awakened to her voice, as his of late had been, could not have heard those half-inarticulate words, as broken and fragmentary they seemed to drop out disjointed from her lips, rather than to be spoken; and then, even whilst she was speaking, she turned away, unlatched the door, and was gone, but not before the burning tears of intense shame, and grief, and fear

had burst out and rained down upon the half-shadowing small hands raised up to hide her face.

Yet, even whilst the outer latch of the old door trembled in her hand, Oliver had risen, come near, spoken to her; but blind and deaf to all things but her own burning sense of shame, she fled across the garden, never once stopping till out within the shadows of the road, though conscious, with a new and sickening terror, that some one had flitted past her in the garden, as if suddenly surprised, and seeking concealment amidst the bushes; and who, she felt certain, though for what object or purpose she knew not, was Joe prowling round Oliver's little workshop. Yet shame prevailed over fear, and going onward, she had soon reached home. Her father had laid aside his violin, and was calmly reading, as if waiting her return. But, to his surprise, she stayed no longer than just to kiss him, and to say that she was very tired; and then, not even waiting to take a candle, she hurried up-stairs to her chamber, and flinging herself down beside her little bed, buried her face in the clothes to weep again, as if her heart would break. Another time the old man might have wondered, and followed her up-stairs to see if she was ill; but his attention to the open page of the "Holy Living and Dying" had made him less observant of Doll's bowed face and wayward humour, and so he read on, divinely smitten by the divineness of the text before him.

And Oliver? How little was this childish

heart of Doll conscious how the stronger heart of the self-reliant man had been of late awakening to the gentleness, the goodness, the earnest faith of her character! How, as design and model grew beneath his hand, he had become instinctively aware, though in no form of theory, how much great artistic effects are strengthened and beautified, and almost made divine, by the operation of unsuspected causes! How, if the heavens, the waving clouds, the russet of the woodlands, the cathedral aisles, their peace and stealing shadows, the grand glory on its floors, the sounding organ, had all laid their hand of glory on the greater glory which had a shape within his soul; still, if the effect should in a degree equal the inspiration, that also innocence and truth, childish beauty, unconscious of itself, the new and loving ministry beside their humble hearth, the flowers so often brought, the many services too small to catalogue, had their effects, too, though less positive and forcible. Yes, he and old John had been talking of Dolly that very night; and only a few minutes before she had come into the little workshop, some effect or association in the work before him had made him recur back to the bright look of hope upon her face as she had crossed the old kitchen an hour or so before; and so thinking, what wonder that the deeper and holier abstraction of the creative faculty had made him neither see nor hear, but be as one who slept? It was but natural—for the worship of the creature is but an ascension onward to a higher and

divine worship; and who would ask a more abounding love than that which by its very nature is linked to, and a part of, the Great Love which rules the universe?

Intent upon his object, for he had grown to love Thornway exceedingly, and fortunate in finding a friend who would do a day's duty in his absence, the old verger travelled to Birmingham next morning. Unlike the old blacksmith, who was hot and explosive in character, Samuel said nothing to M'Clure about his daughter's letter—of which in reality the good-hearted, dinner-loving little brass-founder was entirely ignorant; but simply stating Oliver's needs, and their object, proffered himself as guarantee for payment. However, when all was satisfactorily arranged, and he was invited by Mrs. M'Clure to stay and take tea—she first having made sure, by dint of listening, that he was of too pacific a turn to blab anything about the letter to his brother—he became in his simple pride so garrulous about Oliver, and the prospects of the magnificent work he had in hand, as to secretly make the ambitious mother determine on a visit to Lichfield the very next Sunday. She was, however, too politic to broach the subject just then to old Simon, who more than once had put off the visit, owing to his liking the quiet of his Sunday's fireside better than all the excursions in the world, or to say a word to Samuel; perfectly sure of having her own way when once she was resolute. Nor was Miss M'Clure by any means averse when,

that same night, after old Samuel's departure, she became aware of her mother's intention ; but on the contrary, aided and abetted its fulfilment by every means in her power, though for a reason she did not think proper to impart to her silly mother. That reason was no other than a great and secret admiration for our friend Mr. Coggs, whom she had met once or twice the previous winter at some cheap dancing-school, and whose chain, rings, and whiskers, and grandiloquent talk of opening in the ensuing spring a whole-sale tea warehouse in Lichfield, had taken her heart by storm. To see, therefore, or at least hear of this worthy merchant, as well as show off her astonishing clothes to poor little Dolly, who, I believe, if her box or solitary drawer had been searched, would not have been found to possess even a single pink or blue ribbon, were at once motives enough for Miss M'Clure ; so thus she and her mother were at once two to one against old Simon's love of his Sunday pudding and his Sunday nap.

The good old verger returned to Lichfield that night, and with some of the materials for the casting. These, soon after reaching home, he carried and delivered to Oliver and his brother, who in their great delight talked of beginning a portion of the casting that very night, though the cheerfulness of their humble supper was marred by learning from Samuel that Dolly was very poorly, and had not been up all day.

The next Sunday soon came round, bringing

with it into the town of Lichfield the Birmingham brass-founder and his gaily-dressed wife and daughter. As Dolly Newport was still confined to her room, and Samuel performing duty in the cathedral, Mrs. Newport had the coast to herself. So leaving old Simon to make his way to the blacksmith's, she carried off with much triumph—a triumph in which a certain bottle had large share—Mrs. M'Clure and her gaily dressed daughter to Mr. Coggs's.

Whilst the Messrs. Coggs made an astounding impression on Mrs. and Miss M'Clure, not simply by chains and rings and shirt studs, but by the genuine unadulteratedness of their souchong, and the whiteness of the loaf-sugar, honest old Simon held an hour or two's quiet talk with old John Newport and his beloved son. The more he saw of Oliver, the more he liked him; the more he listened to his unobtrusive yet earnest words, the more grew his respect, the fewer his own; for to be thus effective is one of the distinctive powers of genius; and nothing, at last, could be kinder than the old brass-founder's suggestions, or his generous enthusiasm with respect to the Inkstand. He even proposed the use of costlier metal in the process of amalgamation, had something to say about electrotyping; promised—proudly promised to do all in his power in such a way as might be needed. And, for the time being, meant with the utmost sincerity all he promised; but the unfortunate part was that old Simon's moral courage was not very strong in degree, particularly when

assailed, as it often was, by the quadruple force of his pipe, his pudding, his "missis," and Rose; but of his performance and this quadruple force we shall see more presently.

In the meanwhile, though smitten to a matrimonial degree with the elder tea-dealer, and airy visions of a merchant's villa, and a lady-mayoressship, even of veritable London, had been suggested by the vast talk of Mr. Coggs, in relation to the extent and future prospects of his business, Miss M'Clure had an extraordinary desire to see Oliver Thornway; she therefore, under pretext of fetching old Simon to take gin-and-water, and a cigar, with the two amiable hosts and Joe Martin, and whilst Mrs. Newport was yet confiding in vast detail her domestic troubles to Mrs. M'Clure, and the monstrous sins of the "old fellow," and "the girl," set off towards the blacksmith's cottage, gallantly escorted a portion of the way by the tea-dealer, who, though in so brief a time, managed to unsuspectingly elicit from her the fact of the brass-founder's five hundred pounds in the bank, conjointly with divers expectancies from a well-to-do grandmother. Once near the cottage, he retraced his steps homeward, as, according to his own showing, his "persition as a tradesman kept him like a trivit, high above low people" (meaning thereby, Oliver and the old blacksmith); and Miss M'Clure, with much ceremony and affected bashfulness, and display of her shot-silk dress and lace visite, introduced herself to the quiet little party gathered round the blacksmith's hearth; but with about as

much effect upon Oliver, after the first few civil words of greeting, as the dropping of a rose-leaf on a granite rock, or a straw in the pathway of a giant. No! they had been talking of his work; and the spiritual truth and divineness of work had shed, for the time being, too divine and broad a light within the worker's soul, to be dissipated by the trivial shadow of a silly butterfly. No! in two minutes after her entry he was absorbedly gazing into the cheerful fire, as if the visions there had had no interruption; and this the girl's vain self-love construing into purposed indifference, her chagrin was the more intensified and embittered by the very liking she otherwise would have had for his comely, nay, handsome person. He was a man destined to move in a higher life, she saw; and this, fancying he was conscious of it, wounded her self-love the more. She therefore, with a rude peremptoriness which astounded old John, compelled her father to take his leave at once, which he did with kindly regret and earnest promises—whilst her own adieus were not the smallest in keeping with the butterfly flutter of her entrance.

Once more in the town, she persuaded her father to call and see if Samuel was yet come home, before their return to Coggs's to supper, and the old man willingly complying—for to see the old verger had been the ostensible object of their day's journey—they entered the old court and knocked at the door. No one answering, they opened it and went in, just as old Samuel, descending the

staircase, came across the kitchen towards them. Doll was ill, he said, and had been in bed for several days, but, being better that evening, he had been sitting by her and reading to her, since his return from the cathedral, till now she had fallen asleep. He then, meekly apologizing for the disordered kitchen and dirty hearth, asked the old brass-founder and Rose to sit down beside the little glimmering scrap of fire. This they did, but no sooner were the old verger and her father fairly afloat on some point concerning their late meeting, than the girl rose, and went softly towards the staircase which thus opened into the kitchen. She had ascended a stair or two, when Samuel, perceiving her, hurried to tell her in a nervous whisper that Doll was asleep.

"Oh! I won't waken her, Mr. Newport," was the reply, "but I shouldn't like to return home, as father and mother know, without just seeing the dear child."

So speaking, and not waiting for assent or negative, she went onward up the staircase into Doll's little bedchamber, and, closing the door with a gentle hand, stole softly towards the bed. A survey, as she passed onward and sat down upon the bed itself, convinced her that the old man had not as much to bestow upon his child as her own father had upon her; that if Dolly Newport was beautiful in the sight of Oliver, it was nature made her so. To be more assured of this, she nervously stooped down, yet with her glances cast back every minute in fear upon the sleeper, whose sweet face,

as the old verger left it, he had covered with his pocket-handkerchief, and opened the only box the room contained, one glance into which assured her that her conjectures were correct. She then, with even more malice and impatience than she might otherwise have felt, lifted up the pocket-handkerchief, and the peaceful, sweet, pure, childlike face thus revealed, made her feel sure that this it was he loved and looked upon, who not an hour before had been as unobservant of herself as if she had been a stock or stone. In this moment of dark envy and intense hate, she would have struck it down upon the pillow, and turned every feature into a bruise and wound, if she had dared—though such was her woman's heart—though such was the good mingled with evil, that but for the man she had seen that afternoon, but for her intense fear that this was the face he daily looked upon and loved, she could have knelt down beside it, kissed it, admired it, as now she could have struck it like a stone, or trampled it under foot. At length she could not resist one thing; she stooped down in the waning light and shook the sleeper rudely, so rudely that the girl was in an instant roused, and this in such a state of blind terror as would have made her leap from the bed, but for Miss M'Clure's restraining arms.

"Don't be frightened," she said, restraining Doll in her terror; "it's only me, Miss M'Clure, from Birmingham, and as I couldn't see you in the afternoon, I thought I must just come again and wish you better—that is all." She said this, look-

ing fixedly at Doll; every word becoming colder and more emphatic as she spoke.

"I thought it was my father, or uncle, or Ol——," Dolly was going to say Oliver, but she checked herself. "I'm sorry I've been so frightened—it is so kind of you—you'll sit down?"

"No, thank you, I must go; I hope you'll get better; I'm sure you will though—for everybody loves—everybody speaks of you—even Oliver—Mr. Thornway I mean."

Speaking these last words in a way offensively marked, Miss M'Clure brought her face close to that of Doll; with the result of proving all that she desired to know, as the instant suffusement of the beautiful face before her plainly told. Then, gazing on the girl still more fixedly, she went backwards by slow degrees towards the chamber door, as she said,

"Ay! well; it's what I thought—good-bye."

Then leaving the room with the envy of her soul intensely imbittered by the last sight of that sweet face, too pure for even childish shame to sit upon it long, Miss M'Clure descended the staircase, said briefly that Doll was awake, and then hurried her father off to the adjacent tea-dealers', as abruptly as she had from the fireside of the old blacksmith.

They found supper ready—after this came the promised gin-and-water—and somewhere about twelve or one o'clock the party separated; Mrs. Newport and her amiable son returning to desecrate with such riot as they pleased the house of

the poor verger and his sick child; whilst the M'Clures sought beds at a neighbouring tavern, it being found too late to return that night to Birmingham.

"And now," said the elder Coggs, as returning from his escort of Miss M'Clure, he dismissed for the night the old woman who acted as servant, and closed the parlour upon himself and his brother, "Bob, you and I have a lucky star, old boy, don't doubt it. For we never think of bolting, but up turns luck. As you see to-day—for who in the morning would have thought of a Miss M'Clure dropping in with a nest-egg, as she tells me, of £500, and who is smitten with your humble servant?"

Mr. Coggs here laughed with an amount of self-sufficiency that was marvellous.

"Ah!" said the other, more thoughtfully, "five hundred pounds is more easily talked of than got; and before you can marry the girl the people will be too hot upon us here for what we owe. There is house-rent, and shop fixtures, and furniture, and living—and people will be the hotter upon us for our intimacy with this Joe and his mother; it is more than a set-off against the respectability of the two old men whose friendship we bragged of."

"Pooh, Bob!" laughed the other, coarsely; "you forget the path which led to the highway. What should we have done but for the old woman's money, destitute as we were when we first got to know young Joe in London. Why, if the woman

was willing to be led away by talk of partnerships, and those sort of things that might turn the brass of her prodigal into gold, why, let her. As for this rascal Joe, why, we can wipe our hands of him any hour. But we shan't want to stir a step in the matter, Joe is setting his own trap."

The other brother looked up surprised, and leant forward to listen.

"Why, don't you know," went on the tea-dealer, with a laugh, "how Joe hates Thornway? Of course you do. Well, the truth is—though I haven't told you before—that Joe's dived down to the mystery of the Bronze Inkstand for Lord Clare, and vows his vengeance on it, as do some of his chums in Birmingham, who have a spice of hate against Oliver, for his "gentleman cleverness," as they call it; and his selling his designs, and getting work many a time when they couldn't—for two of the worst of these fellows once worked in the same manufactory with him. Why, it was Joe, and no one else, that walked off with that bit of casting the other day, about which Doll and the old blacksmith made such a hue and cry, and which Joe got two pounds for directly, whilst by this time it is worked up into a tea-pot, and fifty other things. As for the Inkstand itself, Joe vowed no longer ago than this very morning (between ourselves, Bob, this fellow has the malice of Satan) that he'll wait for its last finish, and then make his final decamp from Lichfield with it. If he can't do this, he says he'll put it on old Newport's anvil, and strike it into a million atoms—and he'll be

true to his word, for he hates Thornway with the devil's hate. * * * * As I do," went on the tea-dealer, presently, and with his raciness of tone and manner increased by the pause; "as I should hate anyone likely to be near kin to Dolly Newport. Ay, I do hate him for this" (the man spoke here with a malignity that was startling); "but, though I'll stand free of Master Joe, I see my way clear to a tit for tat. The butterfly M'Clure once turned into Mrs. Coggs, old Simon and Grindsharp shall have a word to say to the verger. Ay! with the Inkstand gone—who is to pay the debt?—eh? eh?"

"Please yourself," replied the brother; "but I think there is quite enough for us to do to steer our own way without seeing the inside of a jail. The people around us are both clamorous and suspicious."

"Let them be. This morning we had no other prospect than a moonlight flit. Now there's Miss M'Clure, and old Simon's money-box. Leave all to me."

So saying, and with supreme good faith in his fortune, this worthy tea-dealer and his brother retired for the night.

But, as if nothing but beauty, and peace, and good were on this earth—as if evil were no part of daily life—as if sin were unknown, some weeks passed on, and the sweet russet tints on leaf and bough enriched in the rising, in the meridian, and the setting of the sun, the blacksmith's grassy lane; and looking down like spirits changing

their glow as the day went by, saw honest labour, and joyous faces, and after tribulation, the crowning fruit of genius. Yes, after some few useless remarks from wife and daughter—for Miss M'Clure rather abetted, than opposed—after Mr. Cogg's future proceedings had been revealed to her during a secret interview, old Simon cheerfully forwarded, as was needed, the materials for the casting. Oliver himself went to and fro to Birmingham several times, and nothing now prevented this magnificent piece of workmanship being finished even before the date needed. And, if cheerfulness and affection do sanctify, as I believe they do, all true labour, this work was richly sanctified; for nothing could exceed the old blacksmith's cheerful voice and manner, or the contented hope and faith of Thornway—though poverty lay so chill around their hearth, and Doll came rarer, though more abundant seemed to grow her silent and affectionate ministry to their humble wants.

Upon his return from the south of England with Aurore, Bertha had imparted to Lord Clare so much relating to her visit to Ryeton Tower as did not trespass on the revelation made by Mr. Maskell, as also all incident to the Inkstand, and her interview with old John Newport. With her Lord Clare perfectly agreed on the two important points, as respected no proffer of service to Thornway till the Inkstand was finished; and that, though the opening of the new library should be fixed as taking place on Aurore's birth-day, no-

thing should be said to her concerning the expected work of art, or of its presumptive excellence. In the hoped-for result of this intention, Lord Clare's faith grew unceasingly, when, now quietly settled down at Arden, he perceived how sterling and solid were the effects of Bertha's guiding mind in all that related to his only and darling child. In art Aurore had already made a man's advance; for languages she had an admirable capacity, and had been led to see, in modern ones especially, larger uses, and more important results than what lay on the mere surface of colloquial accomplishment; and by degrees the proud and loving father found—how, with a sort of graceful flattery to himself, and with the most dignified appreciation of duty and position, Bertha had led on his child step by step, and this without permitting her intention to be seen, to an acquaintance with many questions, both present and to come, nearest the heart of an ambitious public man. As this discovery grew day by day, so did its enriching flattery; and if some frailties hung round his child, he saw that they were those of youth, and the result of certain necessitated intercourse with the proud and narrow-minded relatives of her mother, and that these would be yet displaced by those large and nobler generousities it is the high province of knowledge to unfold to the hearts of all.

And Bertha. In his whole soul this proud man respected and loved her, with that grave intensity which is characteristic of middle life. He had first learnt to respect her; and on this noble

foundation his love had grown, month by month, year by year, just as it seemed in degree his child grew by his side in imparted knowledge and beauty. But, beyond this existence of it in his heart—beyond its exhibition in never-failing confidence, supreme respect, and thoughtful care, Lord Clare had never said one word to Bertha; and though multitudes of times the words had burnt upon his lips—the thought of ‘what will your order say, what will convention say, should an English minister marry his daughter’s governess,’ had as many times negatived the avowal. Still time and noble service had made her the most honoured person in his household; she was his child’s mother—more his secretary than his official one; and yet on friendship so intimate no shadow of suspicion had been cast—for the proudest of Aurore’s suspicious relatives honoured her, and always spoke of her with the respect which was her due. But whilst the pride of station thus triumphed for a time, Lord Clare felt sure such words must be spoken at last—with but one result, as he supposed; but he knew not that Bertha too had pride, and noble pride—nor had he gauged the depth of her affection for his only child. But the flower longest on the stem falls often to the gentlest and most loving hand.

It was one of the earliest days in November, and though the wind swept roughly through the park trees, scattering their sere and tinted leaves in whirling clouds upon the ground, and a mist-like rain chilled the air, Lord Clare and Aurore

had gone for their afternoon ride, leaving Bertha, as she had been out that morning, seated by the bright fire of her study. Looking incidentally up for some paper she needed, she saw Mr. Matlock, the good old doctor, riding towards the hall on his shaggy pony, and in a few minutes he was announced, and came in to take his seat as usual, and to be caressed by the four or five dogs that occupied the hearth-rug. He looked anxious, and seemingly had ridden far, by his splashed and miry boots, but for some time the cause did not transpire; as the object of his visit, the progress of some poor tenant of Lord Clare, who had been severely injured whilst felling timber, occupied their attention. At length as the day suddenly darkened, and the rain, swept by the wind, was dashed against the lofty windows, he shrugged his shoulders, and pointing to his miry boot as he raised it on the fender, said how glad he was his longest ride for that day was over.

"For," he continued, "I have been as far as Ryeton Tower."

"Then," said Bertha, with a rapid earnestness of voice which surprised the old man, and caused him to look up, "the friend we have talked so much about of late is ill again."

"Yes," replied the old man, with marked gravity, "Mr. Graydon is extremely ill. Indeed more nervous and desponding than I have yet seen him."

"Go on," spoke the anxious listener.

"He may yet rally," continued the old man,

“for he has been harassed by visitors and by important astronomical duties through the past week or two; yet, to speak truly, I have never known him so ill.” He paused here, but Bertha not replying, he presently went on, as he bent down in an attitude of thoughtful sorrow towards the fire: “I fear this utter and growing despondency will at last prove fatal, and a man will perish from us, as too many do, who in generosity, pure life, and noble, exalted usefulness has no superior. But I cannot fathom this cause for despondency—that there is one I have been long sure.” His listener making no reply, he continued in a while, though with an energy that proved the earnest truth of what he said, “Yes—yes, I would do much to save this noble soul, and would to God, having known and honoured Richard Graydon long, that I knew a way to save his priceless heart and intellect, or knew the man or woman who might do it!”

The doctor's voice was choked, and sitting still moodily bent towards the hearth, he did not perceive that Bertha had risen, had crossed the room, and now come back again; nor did he see her intensely pale and almost rigid face. At length he was roused by her laying her hand on his, and by her saying quietly,

“I think, doctor, I can.”

He looked, wondering at her words as at her manner; but she waited for no reply, only in a brief word or two imploring his confidence, knelt down as a loving child might by a father, and

gently, almost as a child might pray, imparted to his listening wonder what the chaplain had revealed.

"And I am undoubtedly that child he looked upon and loved," she said with increased earnestness, as she bowed and partly hid her face upon the old man's hand; "and this is the miniature of the seaman whose breast I slept on." She put forth her hand and showed the portrait of a fine middle-aged man, which she had fetched from a drawer in her cabinet. "It is the portrait of my father, and every circumstance of time and place tallies with that of my own history. My poor mother was then lately dead, and he had come purposely on shore, his ship then lying at Plymouth, to take me to a school in Worcestershire. You well know how often I have told you and your good wife these things, that being his last journey, as he perished at sea not six months after. Besides, too, I have always had some strange and unaccountable sympathy—with what I scarcely know—but with what I have had firm faith time will disclose. And now, dear friend, who have known so long my life and duties, what shall I do?"

"What does your heart tell you, Bertha Westall?" said the old man, earnestly, as he laid his hand upon her hair, as a father upon the ringlets of his little child.

"Why," she said, as she raised her fine face, with beautiful fervour, "to do what is right, and now become his wife."

"Can you do this, Bertha?" asked Mr. Matlock, "for rumour has long ago given your hand to Lord Clare."

"It may have done so, but, as too often, rumour speaks falsely. No! never through our many years of friendship has Lord Clare ever spoken words that might be interpreted into an offer of his hand—though I have all a woman's consciousness that such lie at his heart, and sooner or later will be spoken. But much as I in profound sincerity esteem Lord Clare, and regard his child, I could not accept any proffer of the sort, knowing that for years it had been restrained and kept back by a fear of what his order might say at the misalliance of a nobleman with a governess. Besides, too, the world would say that all my years of duty and service had but been as plotting means, on my part, to this one end. This it shall never have to say, nor shall Aurore, who is as dear to me as my own child, ever be deprived, by me at least, of that proud right in her father's household which is her own. No, I love her too generously to take her from the right hand of her father."

"Then," said the doctor, "thus absolved from any bond upon you, speak, or let other speak, to Mr. Graydon."

"I will," she added emphatically; "if this thing be said at all, *I* will say it. Such love deserves truth, and I am so removed in all my views beyond the usages of a convention, weak and absurd in all these points, as to see no sin in

a woman's declaration, provided that her judgment is right. No, the time *is* coming when the subjunctive and imperative—*shall* and *let*—will be as emphatically free to woman as to man."

"Then, Bertha," spoke the kind doctor, "we will lose no time. Dress yourself, and let me leave a note with the butler for Lord Clare, saying that I have called you away for a few hours to see a patient of mine, whom, as he is very ill, your kind presence I thought might benefit."

With a calm, dignified earnestness, Bertha quietly obeyed, and in a short time both herself and the good doctor, warmly sheltered in a close carriage from gathering mists and rain, were sweeping across the park towards the village where the old man lived. Here the carriage was dismissed on its return home, for they had agreed, in order to avoid all conjectures as to the object of their visit, to proceed onward to Ryeton, after the refreshment of tea, in the doctor's old hooded chaise. This they did, after a hospitable half-hour spent with the doctor's wife beside her cheerful fire.

Though pursuing an easier road than that followed by Lord Clare's carriage on the day of Bertha's memorable visit, it was yet sufficiently intricate and girdled in by deep woodlands as to look often, where the trees were thickest, like a lonely mountain pass. Still there was nothing to fear, the horse was a sure one, and the two old-fashioned lamps shone with their bright lights, like flitting messengers of good and cheerfulness,

on the misty road, the russet underwood, the stately stems of trees, and on the troubled water-courses as they swept along; whilst out in the clearer way, where heath and field encroached upon the woodland, the sky, now growing free of mist and rain, gave promise of a night yet glorious with moon, and stars, and constellations. Yet of all these things Bertha was unobservant, and shaded in her shawl never moved or spoke a word till the horse slackening its pace, up the wooded ascent to the tower, she gave the doctor her father's miniature, and asked him, in the first instance, to take it and show it to Mr. Graydon, and if he remembered it, as it was a striking likeness, there would then be a clue that their conjectures were right, and allow her to perform the earnest duty she had undertaken.

Old Letty, as the chaise stayed, soon answered the porch bell, and led, with many apologies, the good doctor and Miss Westall, whom she recognised, into the vaulted kitchen with its blazing fire of wood. She said that Mr. Graydon was in the observatory chamber and alone, and that probably in an hour or so, as the night cleared up, the chaplain would arrive from the Grange. As Mr. Matlock was of course a privileged visitor, he left Bertha without ceremony seated in the old bee-hive chair beside the hearth, and crossed at once to the private door leading to the tower. Conjecturing that the lady's silence and corpse-like paleness arose from fatigue and the chill damps of the night, the good old soul rose and

sought in one of her store closets for some medicinal tincture of her own compounding; but just as she was bringing the taper glass towards Bertha, the door opened, and the doctor with rapid foot came back again.

"Dear Madam," he said, striving to speak with assumed punctilio and calmness, your conjectures are right—please go, Mr. Graydon will speak to you on this important business." Thus saying, he led her to the door, and with an earnest pressure of the hand closed it upon her. Thus alone, she had to stay for a moment to take breath and gather strength in what seemed her failing limbs, and then going upwards step by step, she passed through the half-opened door, in the tower-wall, closed it behind her, and then up the few wide richly-carpeted stairs one by one, till she stood on the topmost one where Oliver had stood, and the magnificent room opened itself before her. And there, standing beside the great table, leaning on it with one hand to support himself, stood he who had so long sought that living face, which now looked on him, though with drooping fear. Still he neither spoke nor moved, only looking to where she stood with blind intensity. Abashed still more, for she fancied anger in his countenance, she came at length to where he stood, and said, "I think we have met before, sir? if we have not, will you say so." Even now he did not speak, but only taking quickly her hands in his, as an eager child would some beautiful object, to ascertain that it was real, bowed his head down upon them.

"Please speak to me, sir," she said, "or at least let me lead you to your chair." And she led him like an infant, to where so many noble honours had been achieved, where so many hours of deep despondency had been endured, from whence so many truths bearing on human progress had enriched science, morals, and philosophic government.

She strove to take her hands away; he retained them with rigid fixity, only bowing his head down more upon them, as if in prayer. Kneeling, she said again, "Please speak, sir—though but a word—as, till you do so, this is a humiliating posture; for if I be the one you have so well remembered, I have come this night in womanly faith and purity—and say now that I will be your wife, if that be a blessing to you."

He only grasped those small hands tighter—he had only power to murmur half inaudibly his thanks to heaven for its large goodness—and he had swooned.

The good doctor, who had expected something of this sort, both from Graydon's debilitated state, and the extraordinary character of the disclosure made to him, had left the kitchen soon after Bertha had, and had anxiously awaited her return in the little vaulted chamber at the foot of the staircase. Hearing her open the observatory door, and descend the stairs with rapid steps, he met her half way, and laying his finger on his lip as a token of silence, returned with her to the room. Here they placed the swooning gentleman on the couch

Oliver had slept on, and sprinkling water on his face, and pouring some wine they found on the buffet between his lips, he soon began, though slowly, to recover consciousness. Then, as he did so, deep tears came to his relief; deep tears, because they seemed the raining out of the last sorrows of so many years despondency. Even whilst his brain wandered, in lessening unconsciousness he had sought and grasped, with what seemed an instinct, Bertha's hands again; and now that the dim mists of the swoon passed from his sight, his gaze was never moved from off her bending, drooping face. "Doctor," he said at length, faintly, "this is no dream of mine, is it?—no thought of yours, meant kindly, to divert or dissipate my many years' despondency—if so, it is a sad mistake, for if otherwise than truth, its end, as far as I am concerned, will be a tragic one."

"No, no," said Mr. Matlock, quite moved and overcome, "this is too solemn a matter for baby-tricks. I love you too well, sir, for any act so cruel. No! from its very truth this is the happiest moment of my life, for I have brought you one who would have few likenesses, search where you would."

"Then," said the recovering gentleman, "leave us for a while. I must listen, and measure out my own years' despondency to no other ears but hers. Go, please, an hour hence come again, and bring Mr. Maskell, who will have then arrived."

When alone, for a long time neither spoke, only still, with her hands in his, she had bowed her

head down upon his pillow, and was weeping bitterly. At length he said, "Please speak, I am listening—I have been listening for you to speak for five-and-twenty years."

"I cannot," she replied, with a humility of voice in keeping with her humility of posture, "till you say you recognise me. This you have not said, and till you say so, I kneel with humility, my woman's heart doubting its right to be beside you."

In an instant he had raised her shame-bowed weeping face, glanced at it, as if he fed upon it, or deeply read it, or attracted it to himself, with as irresistible power as the ocean the rivers of the world, and then, with a cry that bespoke a profounder spiritual recognition than human words might do, drew it to his own, and folded her bowed form within his arms.

Then, in a little while, still kneeling, though no longer weeping, and in a voice scarce raised above a whisper—so low and sweet it was—she, as Othello to sweet Desdemona, recited all the past. Of her birth, her parentage, her father's loss, her many years of poverty and sad dependence, her triumph over these at last, her earnest, self-reliant labours, her literary tastes, her introduction, through their means, to Lord Clare, her entrance into his family, and her now twelve years' care of his dear daughter. Then she went on, and told her listener of her daily duties, and her scholarly life—half-governess, half secretary, as she was—of what had led to her

visit to the tower, of Mr. Maskell, of her interest, through him, in Oliver Thornway, and last of the events of that day, till now she knelt how and where she did. Then there was the opposing story, to which she could not listen without tears. But it was ended by the promise of a future of renewed youth, and more signal usefulness—from its conjointness—to the world.

“And now, my darling wife—I must call you so, and nothing less,” spoke the noble gentleman and scholar—“passing from self a moment, our best service and care shall be given to Oliver Thornway, whose large capacity and hopeful genius I well know, whose self-reliant spirit I honour—for his morality and independence are to me the most earnest signs of his future success in a high walk of art; for to him, and his noble idea of this Inkstand, I shall always, to a degree, attribute the renewal of my life—this unity at last of thy spirit to mine, which so unerringly knew of its existence and its approach. Yes! as I have said, the heavens have a nearer alliance to man and his spirit than he yet dreams of. But from me you must not go again—not for a day. Maskell shall set off this very hour to gain the needed license.”

But Bertha pleaded her home, her duties, and asked for delay. He would listen to no longer one than that of a week—even this reluctantly; if other than this, he would return with her to Arden. To avoid this alternative, she consented. They had but thus arranged, and agreed that she

(Bertha) should drive over from Arden to Mr. Matlock's house, on the evening of that day week, and that next morning they would be married quietly, by the chaplain, in the old country church attached to Ryeton Grange, when the good doctor entered with Mr. Maskell. Though in a degree prepared for this result of his disclosure to Bertha, by the half-hour's conversation he had had with Mr. Matlock in Letty's parlour, the fine-hearted old chaplain, who had known Richard Graydon from his boyhood, and had watched him through all the darker shadows of his useful life, was deeply, inexpressibly affected at the sight before him. But before he could say a word, or more than lay his benignant hands upon Bertha's still bowed form, Graydon abruptly asked what kind of a night it was. Being told that it was a splendid one, and that the clouds left of the storm, swept in dark masses to the edges of the horizon, set off in greater glory the clear field of the heavens, he bid the chaplain lead Bertha up to the floor of the observatory. She rose and gently obeyed, for she knew the purpose was to sanctify their meeting in the presence of those infinite and majestic orbs, in whose divine affinities both had been, and were, such ardent believers. When she had ascended (for he watched her figure to its last-seen shadow on the stairhead), he rose, and taking the doctor's arm, approached his great library table, unlocked a drawer in front of which he always sat, and took from thence a little paper, much worn, and

greatly faded, which unfolding, he showed the wondering doctor, who could hardly conceive such passion and such faith, a little bridal ring, fit for a childish finger, bought five and twenty years before. Yes! the night he had seen her. Then going feebly onward up the stairs, they came out beneath the full blaze of those majestic heavens, so grand, so infinite, and so sublime! The moon in its full zenith, Saturn and his ring, Uranus and the dog-star!

Showing her the ring for such a childish finger, as a symbol of his unerring and long-tried faith, he bid his chaplain join their hands, and bless the unity. This was done with solemn fervour, and though some devout words had yet to come, and a legalizing ceremony, which convention calls to its aid, here, beneath this very arch of heaven, the greatest church in which man can adore and pray, was consecrated a true unity of spirit and spirit.

Só, in the ages yet to come, beneath this dome, hung with the very radiance of heaven itself, the winds, north, east, west, or south, sounding a nuptial song, mellifluous and accordant to the listening ear, great marriages in the purer faith and justice of those times will be consecrated; and man will vow himself to love and duty, and with a purer and more single-hearted faith than we yet understand, by those same signs of infinite and adorable Omnipotence, from which he draws pregnant conceptions for sublimest art, which give him inspiration to speak divinely in divinest words, in which he reads unerring lessons of

equable justice in regard to law, to morals, and to government; and last, and best of all, in which he sees the sovereign glory of beneficent Omnipotence and Power.

In an hour more Bertha sat again beside the doctor's humble hearth, confiding to the ear of his truthful wife that night's strange history.

Only on the condition that she visited him again before the day they had appointed for their quiet marriage, would Mr. Graydon permit Bertha to return to Arden. She, therefore, on the third day after the memorable evening, set out to see the "doctor's patient;" leaving Aurore to entertain some few supercilious relatives then staying at the hall. Tired of these, and glad to escape, the young girl was seated by her dressing-room fire, for a brief half-hour before dressing for dinner, when her maid came in to tell her that a young girl, clad as a "charity-scholar," wanted to see Miss Westall; and when they told her she was away from home, she had asked them to let her wait.

"Come far, and in such a night too, Gittins?" spoke the young beauty, with surprise, for the sleet and rain of the November night pattered against the windows; "why, it must be the poor little girl from Lichfield, in whom Miss Westall is so interested—I must see what I can do; let her come up, Gittins."

In a few minutes more, poor little trembling Dolly, in her small grey cloak of charity, very wet and blown about, stood shoeless in the door-

way ; for the maid, by way of teaching respect to high life, had made her leave her soddened shoes in the servants' hall. Liking at once her sweet face, and seeing she feared to speak before her servant, Aurore dismissed Gittins, and rising, led Dolly with kindness to the fire, untied her soddened cloak, and made her sit down on a footstool beside her. Questioned, and not knowing there was a secret in the case, poor Doll told Aurore artlessly about the Inkstand, and producing a letter from her uncle John to Miss Westall from her pocket, went on to explain that M'Clure having, for some unaccountable reason, stopped what little further metal was needed for the completion of the Bronze Inkstand, her uncle, unknown to Oliver, had written the letter she thus brought, asking Miss Westall to step in with a saving hand, though without informing him. Infinitely surprised with all she heard, and partly guessing why this subject of the Inkstand had been kept a secret from her, Aurore determined at once to see her father. Ringing therefore for the housekeeper, and confiding Dolly to her tenderest care in respect to a good dinner and a change of clothes, she descended to the earl's study. He was writing letters for that night's post ; when he had shortly finished, and handed them over to the attending servant to seal and direct, Aurore sat down beside him, and related Dolly Newport's visit, its object, and her unconscious betrayal of the secret of the Inkstand.

“ And why was this, dearest papa?—if meant

as a mere surprise, the thought was very kind ; if otherwise, and for humiliation sake, I feel already humbled."

"My darling," replied Lord Clare, "however unpleasant it may be for you to hear it, I must speak the truth ; for a long time both I and Bertha have been pained by your expressed contempt for that which more knowledge and a longer life have taught *us* to reverence—the *genius of the people*. Nor had such contempt been confined alone to her ears. On that day you sat in the carriage before the Royal Hotel in Birmingham, some words from you of this character were overheard by a poor artisan of Lichfield, on whom, happily, they operated with no worse effect than to make him form the resolution of working out a masterpiece in bronze, which should prove the injustice of your words, and if possible to you yourself. This fact, doubly interesting from the man's character, and the extraordinary force of his artistic capability, came to Bertha's knowledge, who imparted it to me, and we both resolved to teach you through it a lesson for your life ; and by placing this artistic masterpiece amidst the concomitant grandeur of a newly-adorned and noble room, lead you to honour worthily the labour from which such grandeur grew. This has been our purpose, darling, in keeping the matter secret ; for if you are to be what I wish you should, you must conquer all prejudices of this character, as it is not our class, however much it may have been a patron, that

has given Cellinis to the world. Conquer this and other prejudices of the kind, and, as one moving at my right hand, you may promote a much needed and more appreciating intercourse between labour and conventional power in this one province, that of art especially. For it is in the effective commingling of the conservative and democratic elements of society that true human advance will be found."

"Dearest papa," replied the young girl, leaning caressingly against her father, "I see how weak and prejudiced I have been, and you are right in thinking that I shall be taught a stern and earnest lesson. But it must not be taught as you proposed; think of some way of assisting this work to its completion, and when this is so, and Dolly says it will be in a few days, let you and me go over to Lichfield, and there, in the presence of the work itself, I can express my true sorrow for any unintentional pain I may have given Mr. Thornway; we can do this too the better and more quietly, as Bertha will be away that day on her last visit to her sick friend."

"It shall be so, my Aurore; in the meantime, through the evening, I will think over some plan of sending Thornway what is yet needful from Birmingham, and Harris shall drive this poor child back to Lichfield in the morning, before which time, see her again, and be both gentle and generous to her, which I know you can and will be."

A morning bright and warm for November shone out for Bertha's wedding. Going from

their house to the Grange with Mr. and Mrs. Matlock, the ceremony was quietly performed by the chaplain, in the presence of no witnesses other than the good old doctor, and his wife, and Letty (who had been Graydon's nurse), and her husband. Returning the following afternoon to Arden for a few hours, in order to disclose to Lord Clare and Aurore this great change in her life, Bertha, to her surprise, found both had gone to Lichfield that day, and had not yet returned; and she was the more surprised, as she had been purposely kept ignorant of Dolly Newport's visit. But she had scarcely dined before Lord Clare returned, and, in a little while, entered her quiet room. Though in good spirits, he seemed unusually thoughtful, and in silence sat down beside the hearth.

"I've come home alone," he said, presently, "as I have purposely left Aurore with her aunt till to-morrow, to talk over a few things with you, Bertha;" and then he commenced by telling her of poor Dolly Newport's walk to Arden, on foot—its purpose, and the motive of his and Aurore's visit to Lichfield that day.

"And a most extraordinary one it was," he continued, "for this Inkstand not only surpasses everything of the kind I have seen, and you know that I have travelled, and have an artist's eye, but the artist himself is as fine a specimen of human nature as I have ever known. Though young, he bears stamped upon him the impression of a true and earnest past, as well as the to-come

of a successful future. I will not, however, attempt to describe this work of art; Thornway will, himself, bring it over on the day we open the library, and when he has added the last few finishing touches. I found, however, some sorrow in the midst of so much that was otherwise—for an old brass-founder, named M'Clure, who, it seems, supplied the chief portion of the materials for casting the Inkstand, had arrested the old verger, he being responsible for the debt. They said M'Clure had been led to take these harsh measures by his wife and daughter, who were irritated that Thornway should have found some unknown friend to assist him in the extremity I have already spoken of, as, if left to himself, M'Clure is a well-meaning old man; in fact, the whole scene was one of much pathos, particularly in respect to your little friend, and the fine old fellow, the blacksmith. And, mentioning this little friend, I fancy that there is something more in her heart than sisterly affection for Thornway; but you must step in here, Bertha—you must do something to counsel and educate, nor let this man mar his fortunes, as too many do, by an early marriage; not that this little creature will not make a sweet and loving wife, by-and-by, but, at present, she is a mere child."

"I have already thought of this," replied Bertha, "and partly made an arrangement for placing her to board at a school in a neighbouring village. When I see Mr. Thornway I shall talk the subject over with him."

"And now, Bertha," said Lord Clare, "I have come to a matter most interesting to us both—the frank and noble goodness of our Aurore. I am prouder of her, and love her to-night more than I ever did—for when she had entered with me the little workshop, which, I believe, you know—she looked some minutes, in earnest silence, at the work before her, and then, unprompted by me, crossed to where Thornway stood, and, taking his hand—yes, his hand—with a humility than which nothing could be more earnest or more touching—begged him to forget and to forgive the childish injustice of the words he had overheard—and henceforth to attribute to the worth of his own genius the change that would mark her actions and her words. Need I say that I was proud, and folded her with a father's fondness to my heart. Yet, how much of this pride I owe to you, Bertha? I have come now to tell you so—Aurore knows I do—that a duty beyond mere friendship must be mine—that . . ."

Bertha knew the moment was come when the feelings of the loving father and the noble man had become sovereign over the conventional pride of mere position and birth—and she therefore hastened to stay the declaration.

"Our friendship, my lord, can be henceforth even more legitimate than it has been. For this reason,"—she held out her hand and showed her wedding-ring. Lord Clare's astonishment was beyond description.

"You must be patient, my lord," she said,

"and hear a strange story." She restrained him from rising, and related, as briefly as she could, what I have already set down.

When she had ended, he never answered, but rising, walked to and fro, up and down, as if combating a mighty storm within his heart. In a while, however, he approached her, sitting quietly by the fire, as she did, and laying his hand with kindness on her shoulder said, though his voice was broken and almost inarticulate with emotion,

"God bless you, Bertha, you have done well and rightly—and in so doing taught me a profound and earnest lesson—the one of the many that my class have yet to learn. God bless you for your noble life—and your goodness for my child. Still be to me a friend—still to Aurore a mother—do not let your husband, noble as he is, rob your heart of all love for us."

"No, my dear lord," spoke Bertha, with deep earnestness, "I shall ever be to you and Aurore that which I have been."

Lord Clare bowed his head in reverence and deep respect, and pressed his lips upon the pure and holy hand so frankly given.

"And now," he said, as he rang the bell, "I will order the carriage—and, after coffee, we will go to Ryeton together. No fear of intrusiveness now separates me and Richard Graydon; and from my lips he has a right to learn your pure and worthy life, and your matchless goodness to my motherless child!"

It was Aurore's birthday, and much company

had assembled at Arden, to celebrate it and the opening of the noble library. As it had been arranged, Oliver Thornway was expected, but the day wore on without his appearing. Full of conjectures as to his absence, Lord Clare was about to dispatch a servant to Lichfield, for daylight had passed away, and the festal dinner hour was approaching, when Thornway, far from composed or in holiday attire, and old John with him, bearing the Inkstand in a green rug, were ushered into the study where Bertha and her husband were seated with Aurore and the Earl. With breathless wonder all listened to the story Thornway and old John had to relate. It was, that the previous night the Inkstand had been stolen from the little workshop, and, judging from many concurrent circumstances, which, upon inquiry came to light, by Joe Martin, as he had been seen watching, by Dolly, in her uncle's garden at night, and was now missing from the verger's house, from whence it was found he had at last decamped, with everything of value he could lay his hands on. From Lichfield they traced him to Birmingham, and there, for some hours, lost the clue, till that morning they accidentally encountered old M'Clure, full of contrition for the unkind acts into which he had been led, and full of indignation against his daughter, whose runaway marriage with the elder Coggs he had only an hour or so before prevented; the bubble of that scoundrel's character having just burst in time. From Miss M'Clure's weeping

confession the clue was soon found again, and Joe Martin and the Coggses were pounced upon in an obscure lodging-house, just as they were on the point of destroying the Inkstand, its weight being found to be an encumbrance, and its possession, with the scent of the police upon them, dangerous. In the scuffle, Joe Martin escaped.

"Well," said Lord Clare, "at last we have it safe. For the present we will forget all attendant anxieties, and glory only in the worker and the workmanship. Let us now set it in its rightful place—the library." He was leading the way across the room, with the friend of his boyhood, the husband of Bertha, on his arm, when old John, sidling up with a reverential bow, stayed him.

"Beg your pardon, my lord, but just one word. No later than yesterday, my dear lad found that it was not I who took his Flaxman's books, and that for drink. No, it wasn't, for we found the duplicates in that villain Joe's box—and now, there isn't a doubt or a sorrow in the world between us, and never will be!" He said this with such heartiness, that there were none there who did not respect his sterling English nature.

The little company entered the noble library, followed by many thronging guests. "We will have no other light than this," said Lord Clare to his attending servants, as he stayed with Bertha's husband for a few minutes, beneath one of the magnificent arched windows through which the heavenly splendour of moon and stars shone

down; "this is its true light—and now uncover the INKSTAND."

And so the old man did with reverent hand, when he had placed it on the table. And moon, and stars, and constellations shone down in pure and in ethereal glory, tinged here and there, like blushes on the forehead of the morn, with purple, amethyst, and gold, from a few emblazoned panes above the rest, upon a bell-shaped cup of bronze, girt with an orb of silver, richly wrought—as they shall shine upon diviner work, when men shall be inspired enough, and taught enough, to see in their eternal sublimity not only signs of heaven, but fruits for earth!

* * * * *

Two years have passed, and I have a word or two to add. Joe and the Coggses were transported, no great while after the theft of the Inkstand, for fraudulently obtaining costly goods from various manufacturers in London. Mrs. Newport died about the same time, in an obscure lodging in Liverpool—the weekly allowance afforded her by the good old verger rather accelerating that event by the use she made of it. While Miss M'Clure, brought to a more fitting sense of propriety, by her narrow escape and her father's stern rule, attends to the shop, and dresses gaily, but with no expected result of a second lover, as she is not a favourite with the many worthy men who come to and fro to her father's house.

Old Samuel has left the cathedral, and is now

settled down with his brother in Oliver's comfortable home, in one of the sweetest and most picturesque villages in Warwickshire; while Thornway's skill as a designer and worker in metal has been already made celebrated. Here the artisan pursues a quiet life of labour and self-culture, and though he is a poorer man than if he worked in London, or accepted some of the splendid offers which have been made to him by continental capitalists, he is more a poet, more likely to achieve work worthy of surviving him, by taking from the woods, the fields, and skies, eternal inspiration. In a village some five miles away Dolly is still at school, where she is to remain another year, and then govern that honoured, plenteous home, as niece, as child, as wife.

And now on this fair evening, sweet May garlanding the earth with early flowers, a light wind ruffling the clear, sledged village pool, and carrying the scent of hawthorn through the sylvan lanes, up to the budding copses, and the smooth-turfed common round, a lady and gentleman leave this village, and go onward towards the lofty woodlands. When the fields begin they stay and look back upon the village, where, beside the rippling pool, upon its smooth-turfed bank, sit a young girl, and a man some years older reading to her, though slowly, for twilight is descending, and the stars are seen. Then, as these lovers rise, and go lingering slowly towards the village school, this lady and this

gentleman cast their last looks of interest and affection on the pair, and turning homeward to their home of Ryeton Grange, talk as they go of that high day for Art, when, as in Thornway, the beauty of the moral life and the artistic life are blended into one, and men, through thought and reverential worship of eternal nature, grow inspired.

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The tale is ended, and the last light of evening fades in the western sky. There is a pause—a few murmured thanks—but best of all, the greater homage of silence. Little of art or artistic things do these gentlewomen understand, still less of modern thought and the beliefs and aspirations of our own day—much therefore of this story is a riddle to their ears; but they are humane women and motherly souls, and they can take into their own breasts the patience of the hands, and the moral bravery of the spirit, which has done this and other things, in that quaint old room, with its shadows within and without. They say little, but they press around her, and the riches of their farewell consists in their motherly tears.

“Our good neighbour,” says Anna, as she and Lucy cross the lawn into the opposite cloister, “will be at the gate with his gig at nine o’clock in the morning, and Selina and Mrs. Boston’s niece shall accompany you. Mrs. Hutchinson wishes this, if only for a safeguard. Now, Heaven bless you, and peace attend your last night at Shirlot!”

Happily there is peace. For Lucy finds the

door unlocked, and the old lady ensconced on the sofa as her bed, with nearly all the bedding heaped there, as a matter of course. But Lucy rests well, and when she wakes in the morning she finds she is alone. Presently the good woman who waits comes in to place breakfast, and then she learns that her mother has already had hers, and set off to Temeford by the carrier who passes at seven o'clock.

"How could she guess the precise time of my going?"

"Oh! ma'am, she knows everything—she is so keen."

In an hour all is ready, and Lucy says her good-byes, to many whom she is sure never to see again. At most of their doors the old gentlewomen stand, whilst Miss Simpkins peeps from her gallery window, and mutters her opinions to her parrot, who is no great way off, and the little scholars make their reverent curtsies, as they stand at the great doors in the early light of the sun. The gig is ready, the last words are said, and Shirлот is soon lost to sight in the shadows of its green hills.

When the gig stays in the streets of Temeford the first object Lucy beholds is her mother, and, for the first time for three weeks, this mother breaks the silence of her dire mood.

"Where are you going to?—tell me—tell me."

"No matter, Mrs. Eden—north or south, east or west, so we separate. Farewell—what you say

I owe shall be remitted to you through Mrs. Hutchinson."

"Where are you going to?" is the only reply.

But Lucy and her companion press on, followed by this saddest of Lady Herbert's gentlewomen. At the railway station she attempts to create a scene; but the protecting friend, securing tickets so as to accompany Lucy a few miles, they enter a passing train, and are soon miles away from the little country town.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SORROWS AND THEIR CLOSE.

IT is an autumn evening, just about Michaelmas time, and the sun has been hot throughout the day. It even yet lies glaring on the sections of a great turnip-field, situated about a mile from Shirlot, and divided, by a hedge thickly set with vast old oak trees, from the highway which leads to Temeford. Their leaves are already tinged with autumn russet; but the shade they lend is pleasant, and sweeps far along the green and turfy banks beneath.

On this bank since early noon has lain outstretched a ragged, shoeless man. His face has the pallor of death as it lies there in the shadows, his close-cropped hair is unkempt and sunburnt, and every now and then he stretches his hand to his breast, as it heaves with a low, dry, husky cough. Once he has risen and plucked one of the young turnips; many times has he dipped his hand and drunk from a little spring, lapsing with gurg-

ling music round the roots of the great old tree ; and when he has not slept, he has lain listless and vacant-eyed, as though careless whether he moves again. He has been solitary all day, no foot has come along the narrow field-path, but few along the highway on the other side the hedge ; and the other sounds he has heard have been the cawing of the rooks as they peck amidst the turnips, or the thristle's song as it flits in the hedge-boughs at his rear.

He is awake, and is looking up with a weary, despairing look at the sun as it sinks athwart the great field, when from one way horses' hoofs are heard, from the other the roll of carriage wheels, and, meeting just at this point, the carriage stays, as well as one horse, whilst the other, probably belonging to a servant, lags behind. In a moment men's voices greet each other, and enter into rapid conversation. No longer listless, the recumbent man draws himself up into the hedgerow, and listens eagerly, for he is close upon the talkers, though too well concealed to be seen.

"Anything the matter at the hall, doctor?" asks the horseman, as it seems.

"No, the case is in the village ; the surgeon sent for me as a last resource, but wholly without use. The woman was dying when I left. It is Samuel Clayton's wife, the young man who had the hall farm."

"Yes, as we could get little or no rent, and he neglected every covenant of the lease, we were forced to take the farming stock and get rid of

him in the beginning of the year ; and as his mother would not help him, he has been working as a common labourer, I believe, since then. But what is the wife dying from ?”

“ Her own violence—if the truth be spoken, and I have been told correctly. She gave birth to a dead child early this morning ; and the proximate cause of this was some brawl with her husband, in which she was wholly the aggressor. They led a most discordant life together, I am given to understand—and about a week ago she tried to throw some heavy vessel at him ; but it rebounded—struck her—and she fell senseless to the floor. She has been ill ever since ; and puerperal fever and lock-jaw having now set in, all hope is gone. I left the husband seated by the kitchen-fire, in a state of morbid apathy ; whether the result of drink or indifference—or the two combined—I cannot say. But such a woman, a shrew and a spendthrift—as the neighbours told me—can be no loss to any man.”

“ Well, for the husband I have no pity. He it was who behaved so scandalously to one of the school-girls ; and this steeled our hearts against him when he fell into arrears. But his mother has money, which he must come to by-and-bye ; though, in hatred of the wife she had forced upon him, she would not save him from ruin.”

“ Indeed ! but that Shirlot girl, what became of her ?”

“ She went to service as soon as her child was old enough to leave, and is now in the next county,

in a clergyman's family, as waiting and parlour maid. She is highly valued, and is doing remarkably well."

"Good news this."

"Yes! and you saw Mrs. Hutchinson, I hope?"

"For ten minutes. She is altered since my last visit, and the end cannot now be far off. Any sudden excitement—or the advent of cold weather—would close the scene at once. The only wonder is that she has lasted so long. I did not expect her to see last autumn, and here is the second."

"True! but we shall regret it, whenever she goes. She is an old and valued servant, and has done much credit by her office. Her successor, I am happy to say, is even her superior; better trained and of higher capacity. The trustees are greatly pleased with this lady; and now her sister is installed as teacher, all proceeds as well as we can wish."

"Yes; Miss Mackintosh is, I think, eminently suited to her place. But you—you are going to Shirlot?"

"Till the day after to-morrow. I have only my groom with me this time, for our office could not spare a clerk, though there is much to do; the gentlewomen's annuities to pay, and all the business to transact respecting the sale of land abutting the station of the proposed railway."

"It sells well."

"Wonderfully. The Charity will ultimately be richer by some thousands a-year. To-night I receive a great number of small payments, from

those who have no time to come as far as my office at”

“Yes; railways are as good for Shirlot as for other places. Now, dine with me when you come next to Temeford.”

“I will, doctor. Good night.” So the gentlemen make farewell, and speed on their respective ways.

As also their listener, though his frame is so emaciated and his gait so weary. He goes on towards Shirlot, though presently turning a short way down a by-lane to ask the hour at a solitary cottage.

“Nigh seven, I think,” says a woman; “but my maister’s got his watch, and the clock don’t go, so I can’t say to a minnit. But what ails thee, my man—be’st thee ill?”

“Yes; I’ve been sick in a hospital, a good bit.”

“More likely a jail, my man,” mumbles an old grandfather, who sits, a listener, in the chimney-corner, “for I never see’d a worse face than yourn. Mary, have thy ear for the fowl-house, them tramps will carry off anything.”

“They will; but I hear his foot i’ th’ lane. He’s off to Shirlot—I daresay; fellows like him can beg or steal better there.”

The young man goes on so slowly and wearily, that it is quite dusk before he reaches the lodge gate. Over this he leans and listens, and as he does so the lodge door opens, and the old gardener, coming out, proceeds up the avenue to the hall, with a parcel and some other things in his

hands. He leaves his door on the latch, so that the glistening fire-light is seen through. Assuring himself by acutely listening that no one is within, the young man steals hurriedly into the little garden, and thence into the house; for he is well assured that old Harris would not leave his place so insecure if his return were not to be immediate. His purpose being as it seems fully settled, this stranger goes direct to one of two narrow cupboards, forming either end of an old-fashioned dresser; and where amidst fowling-pieces, garden sticks, and other odds and ends, there hang various bunches of keys; he selects one bunch therefrom—closes the cupboard door—and retreats as quickly and as stealthily as he entered. He has scarcely passed into the dense shrubbery immediately about the house, before the old gardener's heavy steps are to be heard, and in a few moments more the old man has passed into his dwelling and closed the door, entirely unconscious of the intrusion which has just occurred.

So the evening wanes into night. At a very late hour—for there have been many comers and goers—much money brought, and much important business transacted—the agent, after locking up his papers, takes up his cash-box and candle and retires for the night; Tibb, who has stayed up for that purpose, opening the necessary doors. His way lies through the hall and one of the cloisters, and then up a short staircase, to his bedchamber in the wing. As he ascends the spotless stairs, he stops for a moment and puts down his light—

for there rests here and there the visible impression of a dusty, naked human foot. Startled—for it is too plainly seen for doubt—he thinks at first to return; but a moment's consideration makes him judge it best to go on and see what is the matter. He always carries pistols when here on money business, and he has one loaded in a case in his pocket. He puts down his light, takes it forth, and then goes on. When he has unlocked the chamber door, and entered, all is vacant and peaceful. The fire burns brightly, everything is in its accustomed dainty order, and no sign of an intruder visible. But when he tries the door of the adjacent little room, or closet—where stands a bath and other toilet requisites—he finds it fastened, and that from within. Judging from this that there is an intruder here, he gives neither voice nor sign; but locking up, as a precaution, the cash-box in a drawer, he seizes the poker—dashes in at one heavy blow the somewhat thin panel of the door—puts his hand through—withdraws the bolt—and enters at a stride; and there, as he has already half suspected, stands the shoeless wretch—the matron's son. The gentleman's movements have been too quick and unsuspected, or else the open window shows that this would be his point of escape.

“You thief and villain!” says the gentleman, clutching his throat, “what business have you here?”

The question is repeated several times before an answer comes.

"To see my mother," he at last ejaculates, with a throttling sound.

"To rob, you mean—to bring fresh woe to her dying bed. This is your last act of baseness, you knave! Come on, the house shall be roused!" Speaking thus, and in his great passion and indignation forgetting all consequences, the gentleman drags the sullen but not unresisting wretch through the chamber, down the staircase, across the lawn, and to the door which leads to the great kitchen. Here he dashes at the bell wildly and fiercely, and this the more that he whom he clutches struggles so hard to get free. There might be death, or fire, or inundation, or murder, so heavily does this bell sound wide and far. All the immediate household is roused, and the ladies in their distant chambers hear it too; old Tibb, the maid, some of the elder children, the matron elect, come rushing and trembling to the door.

"What is the matter?—what is the matter?" they cry, as they make way for the struggling men.

"This—that this villain was in my room, to rob me of the large sum of money which by some means he has learnt I possess this night, or perhaps to murder me. The will is not wanting, if opportunity or necessity existed."

"Let me go!"

"I'll not—you escaped the last time, you shall not this. Tibb, fetch the keys and rouse Harris and my groom. The latter can run off to the village for the two constables."

"Let me go!" is the cry, and a deadly struggle ensues.

"I'll not. Cease that brawling, you have a dying mother up-stairs."

But the villain has been long ago dead to all pity.

"I'm dying myself!" he laughs. Then, raising his voice to his loudest, he shouts, "Mother, come down, your son is here."

She, poor creature, knows this well enough. Prostrate as she is, having now never left her bed for many weeks, she has been attempting to rise ever since she first made the recognition of who is one in the struggle below. Preternaturally almost, she gets out of bed, throws on an overgown and shawl, and, tottering down the staircase, enters the great kitchen, and approaches the struggling men.

"George!—George!" she utters, entreatingly.

He hears the words, turns and beholds her; and perhaps touched by her scared and deathlike look, replies in the low voice of his better and boyish days,

"Mother—mother——"

These words, so softly spoken, are more than she, so long dying from disease and a broken heart, can bear. Before any one can shield her in their pitying arms, she staggers forward and falls dying on the floor. They raise her up, they wipe the blood from her pallid lips—but she is dead!

"See the result of your life of crime!" says the gentleman, austere.

"No matter. I'm in a galloping consumption myself—the doctors say so. Let me go!"

"I'll not."

"So be it. The grave or the jail, no matter. Tibb, get me a little beer—constables are slow fellows, and I am thirsty."

* * * * *

Not far off in the village there is a house of death too, and when the attending women have covered up the face of the dead, one steps down into the kitchen of the poor cottage, and rouses up a man, who for hours now has never left the seat he occupied, or raised his head from the table on which it leans.

"Maister, the missis be gone, quietly enough at last!"

"She is dead?"

"Ay! sure enough."

He rubs his eyes, as though he would arouse himself thoroughly, and when the woman has gone upstairs again he puts on his hat and leaves the house. It is yet night, but he wanders slowly on, as though he had some definite purpose in view, though approach to it is slow. As dawn breaks, he loiters on a bridge, and as the day grows in warmth and light, he turns into a deeply wooded and solitary lane. From this by and by he turns into the wood itself, and so goes on, till the rear of a cottage comes in sight. Blue smoke curls up from the roof—there are voices within, but no one as yet moves about the door. He sits down on the bole of a distant tree, and watches

the roadway. By and by a man comes up this, and enters the house as though to breakfast, for tea-cups and saucers presently rattle, and children's voices can be heard. Then by and by he goes away again, with many loving words to those within, and followed a good step down the lane by a little child. When the last comes toddling back again, he chases the chickens, or wheels a little barrow, or dabbles in the tiny rivulet. Weary of this, he wanders in amongst the trees, and begins filling his pinafore with the fir-cones which lie around. Then it is that the man, who has been watching him so long and so eagerly, comes towards him. The child does not seem afraid; it is a man he has seen before in the lane, and who once gave him something pretty, which "mammy" called a shilling. He has always kissed and fondled him, but now he raises him in his arms, and caresses and weeps over him with wild vehemence.

"My Sam—my little darling Sam—I can do thy mother justice now, and will! Thou shalt come home to me, little one, and bless my place."

The child is terrified by the man's vehemence, so he begins to cry.

"Please—down—down! I go to mammy!"

But the man does not listen, only caresses him the more, till the child's sobs are caught by some distant ear.

"Sam, my darling, where are you? What's the matter?" calls a woman's voice.

The man sets down the child and retreats into

the wood, whilst the little creature, running forward to its home, regains its smiles—and, fondling to its foster-mother, and the baby in her arms, says, “Man, man!” by way of telling his adventure.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LETTER FROM FAR.

MORE than three years have gone by, and Amy Morfe is home from Whitelands. Various situations have been offered to her; but all have been too far away for her aunt to let her willingly accept—so, as the young girl is energetic, and knows well the necessity of being up and doing, she has accepted temporary duties at the hall of a country squire, and goes thither daily to teach three children.

Buried as the secret is still in her own breast, yet, as the past year has glided by, she has often wondered why the promised letter has not come. She is not impatient; she is not repining; she does not for a single instant suspect him she loves of forgetfulness or bad faith—still, as the months grow, she wonders. She would gladly unburthen her breast to the dear gentlewoman she loves so well, but she remembers her promise and refrains.

Latterly she has taken heart from a circum-

stance so slight that others might scarcely notice it. Always most kind and friendly to her and her aunt—so much so, as for it to be a matter of comment to the gossips of the place—yet, of late, the chaplain's interest and attention have increased. He it is who procured her the temporary employment she holds—and he it is who is always saying to Miss Morfe, "These duties will suffice for Amy—let the future serve itself." Can he know her secret? Yes! surely by his manner he does.

It is delightful summer weather, and her pupils having gone from home for a week. Amy has a holiday. She would enjoy it thoroughly, but for the little brooding care which is ever at her heart. Yet it is a care only, not a grief—to all outward seeming she is as she ever was.

Lady Herbert's gentlewomen are, for the major part, early risers—particularly on a sunny morning such as this is. Breakfast is over in Miss Morfe's room, and that lady herself, following her usual custom, goes round to look at the little plot of ground which lies outside her casements. Here she is stooping, tying up her sweet peas, and otherwise tending her favourite flowers; whilst Amy, seated by the open door, enjoys the sunshine which floods into the cloister, and hastens with some piece of needlework she is charitably doing for an old gentlewoman who is too blind to sew. Presently a shadow rests on the young girl's hands—and looking up she sees Selina's successor as letter-carrier standing, holding a

letter towards her. It is a large letter—a thick letter—one such as never came before. It must be the India letter come at last! She takes it with a trembling hand, and sees it is; and as there is money to pay she fetches it, though scarcely knowing what she does. When the girl is gone there stands Amy with the letter in her hand, fearful, pale, trembling, irresolute what to do—very troubled, yet equally happy! The letter is directed to her aunt—yet she has not nerve to give it to her, or to call, or to look through the casement—for is not her face pale and flushed by turns, and would not her voice tremble? After waiting a few seconds to gather strength, she goes to one of the open casements, taps upon it, and holds up the letter—standing aside as she does this, so that her face can only be seen through the glass.

“A letter for me, my dear?” questions the little gentlewoman when her attention is thus attracted, and she steps to the window. “Where from? A foreign letter! It must be from your youngest uncle, who went away, so many years ago, to Australia.”

But Amy makes no answer. She only places the letter in the hand of her wondering and agitated aunt, takes up her needlework, and leaves the room. Anxious as she is to hear—eager to learn what lies within that large letter—she has not fortitude to face the outburst of grief which she knows will at first follow the question of sparing her to another. She crosses the lawn

with rapid feet, and, blind and deaf to all around, makes her way to a pretty bower lying remotely in the pleasure-gardens of the hall. There she throws down her needlework—there she walks restlessly to and fro, blushing with happy shame, yet feeling guilty as to the disingenuousness which has hidden the secret from one who is all truth and openness.

Full half-an-hour passes, and her anxiety to know the issue amounts to agony, when a voice is heard calling her, and Nanny, coming towards the bower, looks in.

“Dear me, miss, why did you go away?—missis is in a dreadful taking, in a sort of hysteric, I think, for she cries and laughs by turns—the former most, and putting out her arms, as though you were in them, says she ‘cannot, cannot part with you!’”

“Part with me, Nanny! What do you mean?”

“There, miss, you know well enough—you know it is a letter from Mr. Austen, asking your aunt to let you go to India, the month after next. And there the letter holds another for you, which missis hasn’t touched, and there is a great deal of money to buy you clothes, and pay your passage with. Missis says it’s a noble fortune, but that robbing her of you—is taking all that in this world is precious to her!”

“Poor darling aunt! Let us go, Nanny—what can I do?”

“Why, I think, miss,” answers Nanny, “you should have broke it out to missis a bit ago, so

that she might have been making up her mind to spare you. Now, you see, coming out all at once, it is a dreadful shock. I only wonder she didn't guess it, for I did; and the very first thing Peter told me, when he settled a bit ago that we should be married next Easter, was, how much his young master loved you, and how he was sure Mr. Quatford knew all about it. Dear me, it's puzzling to think what missis will do, and Mr. Quatford too, for his old housekeeper is going to leave him next month, to live with her widowed daughter."

"Let us not be puzzling about Mr. Quatford, let me go to aunt! Is she alone?"

"Sure to be, miss. I wanted to call in Mrs. Boston, or Miss Salway, but she bid me not; only asked me to get her a little cold water, and call you."

"There, stay away a little while," says Amy, as she crosses into the cloister, "aunt and I, Nanny, can speak best alone."

When she enters the room, and closes the door, Amy sees her aunt before her in the easy chair, her head bent down, her face gathered in her upraised hands, her whole attitude expressive of sudden-born grief. Stealing towards her, Amy kneels down, and draws the weeping face towards her own.

"Dear aunt, don't be troubled thus—don't!"

"Oh! I cannot, cannot part with you!" says the poor gentlewoman, as Amy thus cleaving to her, her grief breaks out afresh, "my sorrows in

this world have been many, but this would be the deepest, to part with you. I cannot, except with a broken heart!"

"Aunt! don't say so! I can bear anything but this!"

"You should have told me, Amy—you should have told me, and then I could have prepared myself. Dear Amy! I never had a secret from you!"

"Nor I you, darling aunt. Only Islip asked me to keep this a little while, till his means warranted his writing to you. Oh! I was so sorry to do so, I pleaded so hard to have liberty to tell you, but he said it was precious to him to have the secret kept."

"Amy, then you love this gentleman?—for a gentleman he is, and a very noble one!"

The young girl makes no verbal answer—only cleaves closer to the weeping gentlewoman.

"As this is so, darling, then I must strive to spare you, though, God knows, how unwillingly; but I, who love you so, must not stand in the way of fortune. Rise, my dear, let us sit by the window together, and read the letters—for there is one for you, as well as me."

So together, in the sweet sunlight of the summer's morn, they sit and read the noble letters which have come so far. There is money in abundance enclosed, and the lapse of a year longer than the time promised is fully explained. Islip had waited till his work should carry him to a cooler and more hilly region, as also an increase

of income. Now he is most prosperous, and pleads hard that his little wife shall come to him at the date he has fixed. Two ladies making the voyage will be her protectors, will remain with her till her marriage—thus there is neither danger nor difficulty of any kind. All this is written to Miss Morfe, and it is again repeated to Amy, with such addition of passionate words and appeals as seem to have dropped upon the paper like molten ore.

Thus, all day they sit, and read, and talk, and cry by turns; and Nanny is taken into their confidence, and cries too.

"To think, ma'am," says Nanny, "of Peter having fixed next Easter for our wedding, and the parson's housekeeper going, and you and Mr. Quatford left all alone! Dear me, the troubles have come all together!"

"So they seem always to do, Nanny. But at eight o'clock I'll go and speak to Mr. Quatford—no doubt he has had a letter, and will be at leisure at that hour. I only wonder he hasn't been."

"He's been out to-day, ma'am," answers Nanny. "Peter told me last night that he and his master were going to start by seven this morning, to Temeford, and they would not return till six. By eight Mr. Quatford will be sure to have dined, and be at leisure."

At this time, therefore, Miss Morfe goes to the parsonage, and is admitted by Peter into his master's study, where, on the terrace in front of the low windows, the chaplain walks up and down.

He comes in, greets his friend, and takes his seat near her.

"I am come to——" but Miss Morfe is greatly moved, and can speak no further.

"To tell me about these young people. Well, they settled their affairs without us, as it seems, and now they consult us!"

"But you knew that—that—" falters the little woman "that my child was wanted of me."

"Not till lately, not till these few past months, though I had guessed it all along."

"Then you should have told me, sir. I could then have prepared myself for what will be to me utter desolation!" and as she speaks thus, she hides her face and weeps the bitterest tears of anguish. Mr. Quatford is greatly moved, and rising walks rapidly up and down.

"Miss Morfe," he says at length, as he stops before her, "there is no reason that Amy should go; if you anticipate so much desolation, let her stay."

"She cannot stay, sir," says the noble little woman, with something like asperity, "she has confessed to me that she loves your nephew with her whole heart; and can I, who see in duty something higher than all else the world holds, can I keep my darling child from doing hers? Or can I, for any selfishness on my part, I who would undergo any amount of real pain or inconvenience to realize her slightest wish, make her wretched by standing in the way of all her hopes? It is splendid fortune for Amy, higher than any I

hoped for her ; but her good will be my utter desolation, and—" She still weeps on, her grief is so intense.

" Well, Miss Morfe, you and I have to make each a similar sacrifice. When I first parted with Islip for so long a time, perhaps for ever, I felt as you do ; but now greater comfort and equanimity are mine. In his admirable progress I see realization for his hopes ; and this is much, for a few years steady industry will secure him sufficient means to return home a wealthy man. Meanwhile, what can insure his health and happiness so well as the tender offices and loving care of a young wife ? No ! Miss Morfe, you and I cannot stand in the way of these young people—our selfish loves must give place, as you say, to duty ; and the reward may be, that they may come back to us and cheer us at the last."

" Perhaps so, sir," she answers, " but at best I must be desolate for many a day."

" Is there no way of obviating this, Miss Morfe—none ?"

" None," she repeats ; " unless I went with her, and that at my age cannot be, nor can I leave Shirлот for a more active life. I gained independence once, and lost it through others, and now I am too old to undertake the strife again."

" True ; but is there no other method for a less lonely life ?"

" None, sir. Amy is as the shadow of myself, I could take no less cultivated mind than hers to be beside me as a household guest."

"Such a thing could not be thought of. I know no greater misery in life than companionship with uncongenial people. Let that pass now—tell me your age."

"Fifty-five—I was fifty when I came to Shirlot, five years ago."

"Not so old that!—and still active in the mind and body! Do you think you could come here as housekeeper—I want one shortly."

"Mr. Quatford, what would the Shirlot people say?—Miss Pockle, Mrs. Smith, and Miss Simpkins, are already scandalous as to our friendship."

"Are they so. Let them—we'll see if we cannot surprise them a little more. You must come here—I've made my mind up to that."

"Mr. Quatford!"

"I am in earnest. I've settled it in my mind six months. We will get married, and that at once—you fifty-five, I fifty eight, the disparity is not so great. We are too old for romance, but not for sympathy and companionship; I have honoured you for a long time, your right place will be here."

"Mr. Quatford, sir, do you really mean this? recollect my deafness, and——"

"I'll take you with all your defects, and be well content—for no man I know will have a nobler or more generous spirit beside him. There! dry your tears; we will sympathise with each other, and make green the years, till our children come back to us, and bring theirs, God willing, to our hearts. Come! you don't say nay to my proposi-

tion? I can do much for Amy as her uncle, I could not otherwise; and you, Amy the older, will still be at Shirlot, though in honoured independence."

"The good," she says, shrinkingly, "is more than I deserve."

"Not a bit, who are yourself all truth and goodness. Now, we'll get married next week, quietly some way from here, and call Amy to our confidence. There, let us take hands—I have settled it all, you see."

He takes her hand and kisses her, and leads her in honour to his own seat; and when they have talked awhile, he sends for Amy. She is infinitely surprised, yet pleased withal, for to have left her aunt to solitude would have been impossible.

The next week, in a small country town some fifty miles from Shirlot, Miss Morfe becomes Mrs. Quatford. When the news, previously known to Miss Mackintosh, reaches the hall, it enters like a thunderbolt certain doors. Just as in an ant hill, when a spade strikes it down, the gossips, like the ants, run to and fro, through the livelong day.

"Did you ever hear? Dear me!—ah! well, I thought his visits were for something. The old thing! quite fifty-five! and so deaf. His income only three hundred and fifty a year! Better luck than better folks! Ah! well!"

Regardless of all this, a week after the dear lady sits mistress in her husband's home—and six weeks after, the pretty maid with golden hair is on her long voyage to him so worthy of her.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE JUSTICES.

FOUR years have passed into eternity, and once more the oaks round Shirlot are decked in their livery of spring. But the hand of coming death lies heavily in one old room, though to lighten it, or lift it, or make it fall more tenderly, a daughter, tender and forgiving, speeds this day. A telegraphic message has summoned her, and now she reaches a rural railway station, made lately, two miles from Shirlot, just as the evening fades. A pretty four-wheel carriage meets her, the driver touches his hat respectfully, for it is Peter, and the lady who so warmly welcomes her is Mrs. Quatford.

“My mother?” is the young woman’s first question.

“Since she made known her wishes to Miss Mackintosh and myself, that you should be sent for, she has relapsed into insensibility. There is

little to distress you, for her state is not one of much suffering. She may linger yet, Mr. Weston tells us, some hours, and may probably regain her consciousness once more."

"I am glad of this," says Lucy, "so that there may be reconciliation between us, even though deferred to so solemn an hour. She sent for me spontaneously, I hope?"

"Yes; and with a consciousness, I think, of how patient with, and how good you had been to her. None but yourself, I am sure, would have visited Shirlot again, after her great uncharitableness seven years ago. Yet you came, the most forgiving of daughters, and since that received her in London."

"Yes; but poor Selina and I had cause to repent of the invitation. In the two months she stayed with me my little maid and I were worn out body and mind; because the medical aid I procured had little or no result, and I could not just then afford to give her the rich silk dress she craved, she left me in vindictive anger, and with bitter speech. Since then, as you know, I have not even corresponded with her; so that, as matters stood, I am glad this summons is one of her own free will."

"It is. Your coming was suggested by no one. Latterly, she has often spoken of you, and about a week since she sent for my husband, to make a fresh will in your favour. That she had made in favour of one of her sons she destroyed with her own hand. Since then her illness grew, and

after recovering yesterday from a long fit of insensibility she wished you to be sent for."

"Poor mother! that she should die in peace with me is the greatest comfort the world could give me. Now tell me, how are the dear old gentlewomen, Mr. Quatford, and Amy when you last heard from her?"

"All at Shirlot are well and prosperous. We have lost a few since you were here last, but Miss Hazlehurst, Miss Salway, and Mrs. Boston are yet spared. Mr. Quatford is well, and my home, as ever, a most happy one. And, as to darling Amy, when I heard last she had just given birth to another son, making her the mother, even whilst so young, of three children. But you must, dear Lucy, hear all our news when you can. Your room is ready. Miss Mackintosh, Miss Hazlehurst, Miss Salway, and Mrs. Boston, take tea with us to-morrow evening, but it is no use, I fear, expecting you to be our guest till all is over."

"No, not till then, dear friend." And a pressure of the hand expresses further what the lips cannot.

It is quite dusk, when Lucy, alighting with Mrs. Quatford at the white gates, treads Shirlot once more. The shadows lie still more darkly in the cloister, and darker still in the quaint old room, where the dying gentlewoman rests. Miss Mackintosh meets Lucy on the threshold, and leads her to the bed, on which a shaded candle throws a little light, revealing the woman who watches,

and her upon whose face the lines of death already lie so visibly. There like a stone the body rests, though sometimes semi-consciousness returns, and the poor lips feebly mutter, "Lucy, bring me Lucy!" or the weary hands moving towards the pillow, grasps it with a mechanical motion, which has nothing to do with reason.

Lucy steals towards the bed, puts her arms about the poor head, raises it to her breast, and there, as though some sympathetic chord of being flashed from the one soul to the other, it rests, with a nestling sort of motion, which is wonderful to see.

"Mother! dear mamma!" says Lucy, as the bitter tears rain down. But no answer comes, only the nestling is a little closer.

"She doesn't know you, ma'am," says the woman "outwardly, as it seems, though, as she hasn't rested like that a long time, she's sure it's you in some other way."

But presently her hands move again mechanically towards the pillow.

"What does mamma do this for?" asks Lucy.

"Why, ma'am, she's got a deal of gold sewn up in her great pincushion. This is beneath the pillow, and her hands are always going thus towards it, as though to give it to you, we suppose. She won't let us touch it, and there it has lain ever since she was took ill."

"Poor mamma!" and even in that solemn hour Lucy's lips cannot refrain a smile.

But Mrs. Quatford, or Miss Mackintosh, will not let the tender daughter begin her vigils till

she has rested and had refreshment. So loving ministrants as they are, they do not leave her till a late hour; and when in the morning they come again, they find things much the same—the aged gentlewoman sinking and insensible, the daughter still a watcher. They will make her lie down on the sofa for some hours' rest.

“My dear,” says Mrs. Quatford, as she covers up tenderly the pale and care-worn face, “it is not well perhaps to ask such a question in this solemn hour, but—but I am in a small dilemma. Some of our dear gentlewomen, with Miss Mackintosh, take tea with me, as I think I told you this evening, and as my husband is called unexpectedly away on business to a country hall, some miles from here, I should be delighted if I had some tale of yours to read, so as to fittingly amuse and interest those who love you so well. I could give them no greater enjoyment.”

“I think Selina packed up some books and magazines in the carpet-bag, so you can look, dear friend, and take what interests you.”

Mrs. Quatford's search is productive of a lately printed tale; and this still evening, whilst Lucy watches by her mother's bed, there in the parsonage study, in the sweet light of the fading sun, dear hearts, loving the hand that wrote it, listen with interest and attentive ear to

A WINTER AND ITS SPRING.

It was a very cold January night, and the church clocks had all struck eight!

Down the wide staircase of one of those fine old houses which lie on the eastern side of Bloomsbury Square, a lady quickly stepped, and tapped at the door of a back parlour. It was opened immediately by an elderly gentlewoman, who sat alone at needle-work, and who admitted her into a pleasant room, full of warmth and light.

"My little maid Ruth is really very ill, Mrs. Leeson," said this younger lady with much concern, as she passed on to the fireside, but declined the chair proffered to her, "and I came to ask if you would let cook go and get this prescription, which I have found amongst my papers, made up for her. Her pain is extreme, and her face very swollen; but I will try the effects of this remedy—and then if she is not better in the morning I'll send for the surgeon."

"You'll be sorry to hear, Miss Berkley," replied Mrs. Leeson, "that cook has been in bed these two hours; she has caught the influenza from the housemaid, and now both are laid by. What I should do I scarcely know, had I not been fortunate enough to get a poor woman to come, whom I know, to supply their place. But she is this moment gone out on an errand, and I have no one else I could send; for even my lodger Mr. Russell's clerks are all gone."

"Well, I will go myself," replied Miss Berkley at once; "you know I never let an objection stand in the way of a necessity; and my good little Ruth is too worthy of care to be neglected. Perhaps

you will be kind enough to open the door for me when I return."

"But I hardly think you ought to go, dear lady," said Mrs. Leeson with affectionate regard; "think of your position, and how little you go out after dark upon foot. If my children were at home, one of them would gladly go; but as they are not, and I am so poor a walker, why—"

"There, no more apologies," spoke Alice Berkeley; "I must take care of both you and Ruth—and I won't be gone ten minutes—it is but a few steps to my druggist's in Holborn."

So saying, she left the room, and hurried up the wide and well-carpeted staircase to the second floor, where five rooms made up one of the most charming homes that can be well conceived. Towards the square lay the drawing-room; at its rear a small well-lighted study, for Alice was a hard-working authoress; at its side two bed-rooms for herself and little maid; and beyond these was a room that served the purpose of a kitchen, with the advantage of a landing and back staircase, that made the entire home still more retired and pleasant. Beautifully clean and neat, and tastefully and well furnished were these rooms—all this the true reward of several years of solitary endurance, hard labour, and many sorrows. But Winter was nearly by—and Spring at hand!

Passing softly into her little servant's room, which was but dimly lighted by a shaded candle, she stole to the bed, and knelt down beside it, "You shall soon have something to ease your pain,

Ruth," she said; "I have found Dr. Burnell's prescription, and it will be soon made up. Now keep as warm as you can—I will bring it as soon as it is here."

"But you are not going, dear missis, to——" was an interrogation begun, but not ended, for a "hush! hush!" interrupted it, and in another moment the room-door had closed upon this best of little mistresses. Proceeding at once to the kitchen, she set some gruel to simmer on the hob; and then equipping herself in a warm shawl and plain bonnet, Miss Berkley hastened on her way. Though very cold, it was a fine night, and Holborn was crowded with passers by, so that it took a somewhat unreasonable time to reach Mr. Blueball's shop in the vicinity of Chancery Lane. That excellent chemist was *solus*, and indefatigably compounding divers prescriptions for a varied class of patients. But knowing Miss Berkley as an eminent little personage in her way, he laid down the very delicate pair of scales he was handling, and awaited her need with much respect. In a few words she described the illness of her little servant Ruth, and giving him the prescription, begged he would make it up while she waited. To this latter point, Mr. Blueball, in his great politeness, dissented, said he would prepare it and send it; but Alice, describing her little maid's great pain, her own anxiety to relieve it, and the general sick state of the household where she resided, sat down to await the rapid evolution of pestle, mortar, and tincture glass.

"A very nice prescription this, ma'am," remarked Mr. Blueball, when he had mastered the Latin of the important document, and commenced his office of compounder, "and its writer a very remarkable man—as I always say, if *my* life were at stake, Dr. Burnell would be the man to save it, if saved it could be. But I think you know him, Miss Berkley; he attended you, if I recollect rightly, in that severe illness you had two years ago."

"Yes," was the laconic reply.

"A remarkable man," repeated Mr. Blueball—who, by the way, vastly loved a little gossip, and wished it on this occasion to take a literary turn, in reverence to his customer. "His new book, I hear—it is to be published to-morrow—is equally remarkable. A physician who frequents my shop told me the other day, that as a philosophic work upon progressive medicine it is unrivalled. In fact, one or two who have seen the proof-sheets consider that it will mark an epoch in medical literature; and is the more likely to do so, from its enlarged and, in some senses, unprofessional character. I shall certainly read it—we are all the better for knowledge, Miss Berkley."

This was honestly said, for Mr. Blueball was an intelligent man.

Whilst the good druggist thus conversed, the shop-door had opened and closed, and some one now came shuffling towards the counter, at the rear of the chair on which Miss Berkley had taken her seat.

"You must make this up as quick as ye

can," croaked an ill-tempered aged voice; "and if you can tell us on a night-nuss I shall be glad, for Peggy Trigs and I can do no more—night-nussing ain't *our* work."

"Who is ill?" inquired Mr. Blueball, for he had not as yet examined the piece of paper thrust into his hand, and which bore unmistakable signs of dirty fingers and spots of grease.

"Why, Mr. William Fitzgerald, the barrister, of No.—, Roll's Chambers."

"Dear me!" replied Mr. Blueball with much interest. "I am really sorry to hear it; he is a very clever and gentlemanly man—"

"Well, I know nothin' about his nicety," interrupted the querulous voice; "I only know a more meaner man don't live. Why, he's never nothin' but chops that the clerk gits; whilst there's Mrs. Trivit and Betsy Brag, as does for forty-one and twenty, gits basins of soup, and wine and nice bits, as come down, and ain't ask't more for. That's the way *they* can git on. But as Peggy Trig says, there's a-nothin' for she and me but money—little enuf o' that, and no thanks. And so I ain't a-goin' to add night-nussing to day-work, and leave my dooties to other gentlemen."

"Perhaps," said Mr. Blueball quietly, "he is poor—it is not all of us that can make fortunes."

"That ain't nothin' to me," was the unfeeling answer; "what *I* does *I* must be paid for."

"I by no means doubt it," replied Mr. Blue-

ball drily. "But now tell me two things—when was Mr. Fitzgerald taken ill, and what is the matter with him?"

"Why, ye see, late as he goes to bed—and he's often reading and drinking green tea at two o'clock in the morning—he's up early enuf. Seven is *his* hour for fire and breakfast these cold mornings. Ah! I jist wish a few on 'em knew what it be to turn out into the raw air without sumfen comfortin'! Well, I was jist a-lightin' his fire—there's but a bundle a wood a fire, though, as Peggy Jones says, if I'd her sperrit I wouldn't do it—when out he groans, and calls me. 'Mrs. Snew,' says he, 'I'm werry bad.'—'Are you, sir?' says I—a-goin' in to his room, and lookin' at him as he lay in bed. 'I ain't a bit surpris'd, a-readin' and a-goin' on as you do. Why, I've made your bed I think these two years, and have al'ays found *that* book as is there now 'aneath your pillow.'—He stopped me short with a heavy sigh, and said, 'Go for Mr. Brownlow, the surgeon, and send Doody'—that's his clerk—'in to me as soon as he comes.'—'I ain't a-goin,' Mr. Fitzgerald,' says I, 'till I've made you a cup o' tea—the sight a good cup does *me* is surprisin'.'—So on I pops the kittle, gits it to bile—makes him a strong cup—carries it in. Bless ye, Mr. Blueball, he never so much as says, 'Take a cup yerself, and put a little drop o' sumfen comfortin' in't if ye like.' Oh, dear no! nothin' o' that sort. *So*, when I'd got *his* tea, off I runs

for the doctor, Doody not having yet come. Well, the doctor's soon there, and there he's bin, nigh all this blissid day, with a fersishon too; and preshus work they've made on't atween 'em for me and Pegg Trigs, for help I was obleeged to git; for to say nothin' o' gallons of bilin' water, hot sand, and mustard poultices by the score, they've bin a bleedin' him in sich a way as I and Peggy Trigs never saw. They say he's mighty bad, and so he may be, but I can't undertake night-nussing, with five beds, seven fires, ten pair o' boots, chops and stakes, knives and forks, to say nothin' of etsetrays. Particular to-night, as I promised Betsy Brag to jine her in a piece o' tender tripe and roast taters at eleven."

"Where's Mr. Doody?" interrupted Mr. Blueball, somewhat cholerically, "has *he* no humanity for his master?"

"I hope you don't mean to be sayin' I ain't, after what I've bin a-doin' on to day? As for Doody, he's chairman of a conwiwial meetin'—though master don't know it—and wouldn't be away when the kidneys and welsh rabbits is on, to be made a lord mayor or alderman. But that's neyther here nor there—*are* you, Mr. Blueball, a-goin' to say if you know of a pusson as can nuss—?"

Mr. Blueball's rejoinder was interrupted by a stifled cry of pain. Looking downwards in surprise, he found it proceeded from Miss Berkley, who the instant before had been gazing round

intently at the old woman, and drinking in every word she uttered. Thinking the lady felt ill, he hurried round the counter and raised her drooping head.

"No, thank you," she said, in return to his anxious inquiries, "I am *not* ill. It is nothing more than a sudden and intense pain; a spasm, I think—perhaps from over-fatigue. Pray proceed with your duty to this woman. I—I—I—am better now!" But the good druggist saw, by the intense pallor of her lips and face, and the difficulty with which she seemed to find a few coherent words, that her indisposition, whatever might be its cause, was greater than she would admit. He therefore mixed some *sal volatile* with water, gave it to her, and when she seemed in a degree restored, proceeded, at her request, with his intended answer to this choice specimen of the laundresses of the Inns of Court.

"Why," he said, "I should be glad to oblige Mr. Fitzgerald if I could, but I really know no person competent for the duties of a night-nurse. I have had occasion to recommend so many lately, for the season is but a sickly one, that my list is exhausted. It, however, appears to me, that Mr. Fitzgerald cannot be left as he is at present, so as soon as one of my young men returns from the city he shall take a cab and go up to St. Bartholomew's Hospital, and see if the address of a nurse can be found there. Indeed, I will write a note to the house-surgeon, with whom I am acquainted."

"Ay, that won't do," replied Mrs. Snew, with a vicious shake of her head; "a nuss *must* be got at wunce, or not at all. I've bin on foot all day, and ain't a-goin' to be all night—to say nothin' a' disappointin' Betsy Brag, and she biled the tripe on puppose, and made the ingin sorce, a' which she knows I so partikular relish. So if you'll be 'andin' me that purscription, I'll go elsewhere."

"I, I, I think—I know a person who would exactly suit," said Miss Berkley at this juncture—though with an hesitation that one less earnest than Mr. Blueball might have noticed—"her residence is but a few steps from here; and if you will be so good as to proceed with this gentleman's prescription, Mr. Blueball, I will go and find her, and return with her here, if she can come."

Urgent as the case was, and advisable under any circumstances to secure better treatment for the sick and solitary man, than such as he was likely to meet with from the harpies which surrounded him, Mr. Blueball at the first moment hesitated to accept the kind offer, so far as it necessitated Miss Berkley to seek out personally the individual she mentioned. But when she assured him that there would be no chance of securing this person's efficient services, as she was not a professional nurse, except through her own intercession—and when, moreover, she assured him that she was really better—though her intense pallor sadly belied the ready words—

he suffered her to depart, with the thought, as she closed the door, that she was not only one of the most clever, but the most genuine and best-hearted women in the world. Mr. Blueball's opinion was a strictly correct one.

With steps that scarcely touched the ground, and with an energy which proved how intensely her mind was moved, Miss Berkley took her way down Chancery Lane to the chief gate of Lincoln's Inn, the lesser ones open in the day being at this hour locked; and gaining admittance, hastened to that noble pile of buildings in which the library is situated, and which overlooks the New Hall and fine lawn of the Inn. Ascending one of the wide staircases, lighted by gas, Alice Berkley knocked at a door on the first floor, on which was painted "Serjeant Greville." It was opened immediately by a young female servant, who with a reverential curtsy ushered the lady into a hall of moderate dimensions, but of great beauty, for it was decorated by a fine-painted window, noble busts of great statesmen, lawyers, and philosophers, and with statuary and carved furniture. Before Alice, however, reached the door towards which she was led, it was opened from the interior by a staid woman of forty, or more, who, coming hurriedly towards Miss Berkley, clasped her hands within her own, lifted them towards her lips, and imprinted grateful kisses on them, gloved as they were. Then seeing Miss Berkley's intensely pallid face, and her state of ner-

vous excitement, she heaped questions one upon another, that were full of anxiety and respectful tenderness.

"My dear lady, what *is* the matter?—why are you out so late to-night, and this without Ruth?—why not send for me instead of coming?—you know if you needed me I would rise at midnight."

"Dear Janet," replied Alice, with nervous haste, "let me speak: I have something—much to say to you."

Obeying, though with anxiety and alarm, the woman led Alice into a noble room, evidently the one used by Serjeant Greville as his study, by the book-lined walls; and closing both the inner and outer doors, led her to a chair by the fire. But now alone with one of her own sex, and one in whom she had implicit trust and confidence, the intense anguish and tears hitherto restrained burst forth, and throwing herself in Janet's arms, Alice wept like a child. It was fearful to see her so deeply moved. For some few minutes, so wild and pitiful was this grief, that Janet could gain no insight into its cause; but as Alice grew calmer, and took the proffered seat, what she had so lately listened to in Mr. Blueball's shop came forth word by word; and Janet, with a woman's quick insight, began to read the truth.

"Thirteen years ago," said Alice, with a tremulous hesitation, that showed how reluctantly this secret was drawn from her lips, "I was en-

gaged to Mr. Fitzgerald. I made his acquaintance, through a visit paid to my eldest brother, who, as you know, was also a barrister. Evening by evening Mr. Fitzgerald came to my brother's chambers; for, though newly married, my brother kept temporarily there till he could meet with a fitting house; and a mere passing acquaintance-ship ripened into an attachment between me and the austere lawyer. He was much older than I—I was not seventeen, and he was thirty; but that made no difference—rather, on the contrary, provoked my noble estimation and regard for him; for I have always admired what was powerful, masculine, and abstract—and I would rather win the heart of a grave man than that of an effeminate simpleton. Mr. Fitzgerald, too, proceeded—perhaps unconsciously to himself—in the very way most calculated to ensure my affection. He took pains to inform my mind; he read to me, brought books, discussed grave and masculine topics with me; and for the first time in my life I felt that I had some one for a friend who sympathised with and understood my intellectual yearnings. Oh! those weeks—those inexpressibly happy weeks!—how full of radiance they were, and how little did I dream that a long winter of disappointment and adversity was so near at hand! Sometimes I have thought—and there is no self-accusation more bitter—that the love was all on my side. Perhaps so. At least William said he loved me, and offered me his hand—desiring, however, that our engagement be kept

secret for a time. This I regretted—for why should there be secrecy where all was so pure, and where it would have added to my joy had the whole world known of my love for this man! You have heard enough, Janet, of my sister-in-law, and how whatever might afford happiness to others was naturally a subject for her malign arts. She guessed our secret, and took her measures accordingly. There was a lady, much older than William, who aspired to be his wife—though outwardly she professed a mere platonic friendship. This person occasionally visited my brother's chambers. She and my sister-in-law, therefore, soon began to talk of Fitzgerald's 'foolish' admiration of me, and the 'friend,' upon a plea of 'deep friendship,' took the opportunity when she met him—as she occasionally did—at the country house of another friend, to advise with him upon 'his foolish weakness' for a young and 'penniless girl.' From the result—Fitzgerald was undoubtedly a listener—though, as I have often thought, the man who had devotedly loved me, and who meant to keep his faith, would have judged the motives of this interference, and at once silenced it. This is what *I* should have done had the case been mine. Be this as it may, these arts took effect, and Mr. Fitzgerald parted coolly with me, when I took my leave of him previously to my return into the country. He wished, however, to keep up a secret correspondence with me—this I refused: the result was a long and wasting illness, which laid me prostrate many months. As I recovered, a new

and nobler sense of life and its duties dawned upon me. I felt conscious that I had much that was powerful in my intellect. I determined to cultivate this, and rise *greater* than the slight the man I had loved had cast upon me. I resolved to live, so as to cause him to regret that he had not estimated my character at a higher price. The time came when I could put this resolve into force. I came to London, and began my long and stern winter of self-denial and labour—it has been a long one, God knows, but I have nearly conquered: I have all I covet—a name, a pleasant home, bread for the morrow, and loving friends: nor, in the meanwhile, has Time forgotten its issue of divine justices—not that I prayed for them; but they have come. Once only through the ten years that I have been in London have I seen Mr. Fitzgerald; and then it was casually, one day, in Gray's-inn Square, and this unseen by him. I went home, and kept my bed for upwards of a week. Till to-night I have never once heard of him, except that he has never married; for I never once put pen to paper to him, never once frequented any place where he was likely to come—though I confess, Janet, that I have never once been led down Chancery Lane on business without crossing to the side on which he lives, treading in his footsteps, and blessing the threshold of his home. Oh, yes, Oh, yes, I should do this if I were ninety!”

“It is like you, dear lady,” wept Serjeant Greville's housekeeper.

“And now, as I have told you,” continued Alice,

"I have just heard of his being very ill, perhaps dying, perhaps—." Here Janet had to soothe her wild grief, for untempered it was for some minutes. "He is solitary, I know," she fervently added, "perhaps poor; and so, Janet, I have come to ask you to be his nurse for a few hours, and to use my purse as if it were his own. You are well known in the Inn, and can go and do what I could not without loss of character."

"I know it, dear Miss Berkley; and you are welcome to my services, as you know; for have you not raised me up friends, obtained for me this noble home, and one of the best of masters?"

"Hush!" and Alice, rising, laid her finger on Janet's lips.

"Well," continued Janet, "it is very lucky that master's out. The chambers are quite safe, for Mr. Wetherbee, the clerk, always sleeps here when the Serjeant's out of town; and Priscilla can wait upon him. Besides that, I've master's full leave to take a holiday; for he repeated to me in his letter of this morning, that if I liked to spend a day or two at your house, and assist your little Ruth in needlework, or any other thing, I was quite welcome."

"He said the same to me," replied Alice, "in a letter I had yesterday; and had Ruth been well, she was coming down to fetch you. But now let us make haste; take what money I have, it is but two sovereigns; but to-morrow you shall have more. Mr. Fitzgerald shall not want whilst I have a shilling; though you must solemnly promise not

to reveal any interest of mine in this matter."

The promise was given, the money put carefully in her purse, and then Mrs. Roden—for such was Janet's name—prepared to accompany Miss Berkley. This she quickly did, when she had seen to the safe custody of several articles of great value, given various directions to Priscilla, the little maid, and informed Mr. Wetherbee, who fortunately at that instant came in, that she was going out for the night to sit by a gentleman that was very ill. She then dressed, and left the chambers, though not without filling a little basket with such small things as would be useful in a sick chamber. Arrived at Mr. Blueball's, Alice introduced Mrs. Roden "as the kind person who had promised to attend Mr. Fitzgerald till another nurse could be obtained;" and the prescription having, in the meanwhile, been compounded, and Mrs. Snew being anxious to be off to her anticipated treat of "tripe and ingins," no further time was lost. In a few moments more, Mrs. Roden was on her way to Mr. Fitzgerald's chambers; and almost as quickly Miss Berkley, with her prescription safe for little Ruth—for she was anxious to avoid any of Mr. Blueball's cross questions—was going onwards with rapid steps towards Bloomsbury Square.

Mrs. Leeson, who had been alarmed by the length of her absence, let Alice in as soon as she knocked. She quieted the old lady's fears by saying that, having to wait for the prescription, she had gone in the interval to speak to Serjeant Gre-

ville's housekeeper. Then taking a light from Mrs. Leeson's hand, Alice was going up-stairs, when the old lady asked her to stay an instant, and following her, placed a letter and a parcel in her hand, with the information that they had been left for her during her absence. The quick eye of Alice recognized at once the well-known masculine handwriting; her heart beat rapidly, and briefly thanking Mrs. Leeson, she hastened up-stairs, for she was not willing that her agitation should be perceived. But her love and care of her little servant were paramount above other considerations, intense as they were; so placing the book and letter reverently upon the table, she roused up her study fire, and then went into the chamber of her little maid, whom to her sorrow she found in great pain. Throwing off her shawl and cloak, she applied the soothing lotion, with such excellent effect as to soon relieve the pain and abate the swelling. She then administered a gentle opiate, gave her, spoonful by spoonful, a cup of gruel, freshly arranged the bed and pillows, and then left, with hushed foot, her young patient to rest. In a few moments Ruth was in a profound sleep, and Alice, locking the door towards the wide staircase, retired to the warm hearth and solitude of her quiet study.

It was now late, and all the house was still; yet for a long time she sat, neither daring to look at the book nor touch the letter, so many and varied were the feelings that oppressed her. At last unsealing the parcel, she saw, as she had sus-

pected, that it was Dr. Burnell's gift, her name being written therein; and then, with somewhat of desperate haste, opening and reading the letter, she found that it was a deliberate offer to herself of becoming the wife, and this at an early date, of the eminent physician. She had long known his friendship for her, his admiration of her writings, his respect for her triumph over many difficulties—for she knew, and occasionally visited, his mother, who lived at Richmond—but she had had no idea that he would exalt her by this splendid offer. Thus wonder-stricken, she sat for a long time like one in a dream, full of a rich happiness that was chequered by doubt and sorrow.

“For several years,” wrote the large-souled writer, “I have witnessed your earnest and beautiful life, your struggle with fortune, yet your negation of what was selfish and mean. But more than all, I have estimated your intense benevolence, your splendid and enlarged view of all things connected with knowledge, truth, and morality. I estimate you thoroughly on all grounds. Had my hand been free, I should have made you this same offer soon after my first acquaintance with you, four years ago. My attendance upon you in your trying illness only increased my knowledge of your benevolent spirit, and your ceaseless search after what was enlarged and pure. A few months after your recovery I lost, as you know, my long invalided wife—so many years older than myself, yet so young in all the best

virtues of humanity. I did not marry her, as the world has been pleased to think, for either her riches or station—and she had both—but through reason of peculiar circumstances that were confided to me, and that will for ever remain inviolate. I could be no other than nurse and companion to her; yet she strived to shed blessings on my path, and at her death left, through her gift to me of her noble fortune, earnest proof of her estimation of the sacrifice I had made. To-day is the second anniversary of her death, and that, as you will find, of the publication of the fruit of many years' thought, and some years' labour; and I celebrate it by offering my hand and fortune to you. With you I can be happy; for I need the co-operation of a large intelligence. Think over what I write, and I entreat you to let the result be favourable. To-morrow at four o'clock I will call: be alone, and let me speak unreservedly: let there be perfect faith and unreserve on both sides."

This letter was read over many times; then for a long while Alice sat, deeply pondering over many things; and when she rose, and retired to her chamber to rest, she had resolved that reverence to what was best and noblest in her nature, more particularly the virtues and results which had taken growth—however indirectly from narrow repudiation and blind self-interest—should meet with due reward, and noble duty triumph over misplaced love! It was late when she awoke next morning, though intending to rise early and carry Ruth her breakfast. But diligent little

Ruth, who loved her mistress much, was up before her, and greatly better, and, refreshed by a good night's rest, had, with the help of the charwoman, arranged Miss Berkley's apartments with their accustomed neatness, and placed breakfast. Though scolding a little at finding Ruth so premature in proving her convalescence, she was secretly pleased at such an auspicious beginning of an eventful day; and rising, and breakfasting, was soon afterwards seated in her warm and cheerful little study, at her accustomed labours—the result on this day rather of habit than of inclination. Her thoughts wandered to poor Fitzgerald's solitary chamber, to the study of the grave physician. There was doubt, apprehension, recollection of the past, hope for the future; but her determination of the over-night never once vacillated. There was little that was weak or changeable in her character.

At ten o'clock Ruth brought up some letters; a glance told her that there was not one from Janet. She then laid down her pen, and forbidding Ruth to keep further in the cold, made her retire to the kitchen, and lie down on a sofa that was there. To secure her in this unwilling rest—for the attached little servant pleaded many duties—she fetched a pillow and counterpane, and covered her up warmly.

"There is nothing, Ruth, but what others will do on an occasion of this kind. You are still debilitated, and your face swollen: lie still here till the afternoon, and then, if you are really

better, you shall dress, and arrange the study for me ; for at four I expect a visitor."

With this she returned to her room. The morning passed away, but there came neither visit nor letter from Janet. Her anxiety was extreme. At noon she carried Ruth some broth, and at two o'clock took an early dinner with Mrs. Leeson, who was pleased to tell her that both servants were better ; in a day or two her well-ordered household would be proceeding according to accustomed rule.

I do not, in this case, no more than in any other, attempt to draw an improbably perfect character, and so ridicule nature. We must all own to small weaknesses, though we may be the possessors of great strength ; and therefore, I must acknowledge that Alice Berkley took more than usual pains with her toilet that afternoon—that her hair was arranged with more than its usual beauty—that her collar and sleeves were those of a gentlewoman; the room in perfect order, the hearth swept, everything as it was accustomed to be, though with a shade more precision. To one entering, the very air and aspect of the room involved the instantaneous idea of intellect and cultivation. Some may think that her grief and anxiety could not be of a very sincere and lasting kind ; but the direct contrary was the truth ; and the very resolution she had taken gave a depth to the many bitter tears she had shed. In such a case, what could she do ? Was she to give up friendship and love of which she was sure—which had exalted her, which

had been so sincerely cherished, for a love which might never have existed, and which, even if it had, had perished, undoubtedly, like the name of the dead? No; she did well; and her little weakness, if weakness it were, of honouring this sure and noble love—through attention to that sense of beauty and perfectness which belongs to woman's nature and woman's cultivation—was right, though touched a little by infirmity.

At four o'clock precisely Dr. Burnell's carriage stayed at the door, and in a minute more he entered with fine and manly presence the little study. "This is always a pleasant and cheerful room," he said, "and looks as if some noble brain-work were done here."

In this way he began his talk. But Alice's agitation was very great: her words clove to her lips, and she was almost dumb. "Come," he said, in a few minutes, "let us begin the subject we have to discuss; for I am anxious to learn if there is any hope for me. We are both much too sensible to fence with an honest truth."

With a straightforward genuineness that was eminently characteristic, she revealed her early attachment for Mr. Fitzgerald, their long separation, and the strange incident of the previous night, which brought to her knowledge his dangerous, perhaps fatal illness.

"I suspected something of this sort," replied the doctor; "for I am somewhat a gifted reader of human passions, their mainsprings, and tendencies; it is my art to be so. Loftiness of purpose,

and unvarying purity, have their causes as well as other virtues ; and you could not have walked so undeviatingly as you have, encouraging attention from no one, without some dignified purpose on which to rest. In this case, therefore, I suppose disappointment is to be mine ; for there is nothing to hope ! ”

“Nay, dear Doctor,” replied Alice, “I cannot say that—cannot say what are really my feelings on the subject ; on the contrary, will you, as the greatest act of friendship you can show me, let this question be suspended between us for a few days, and let us be, till then, simply old acquaintances ? I shall not assuredly let a feeling of long past years triumph over the nobler duties and the nobler aspirations of the present, unless he be in poverty, in sorrow—unless he confesses he loves me, and wishes me to be his. But let us say no more touching this subject for a few days, and be sure I shall no more lack generosity than I do an appreciation of your noble offer. In the meanwhile, will you go as a friend, and see Mr. Fitzgerald ? ”

He gladly assented, and promised to return and tell her of the sick man's condition. He did so, and in some three-quarters of an hour was again seated in the pleasant little study. “He is very ill, severely ill,” he said ; “and is, and has been for many hours, delirious. He may recover temporarily, but his constitution is too undermined for his life to be extended beyond a few months ! ” Here he paused.

"And do you think," asked Alice, "that he is poor—that need and disappointment have brought this illness on?"

"There has been some cause of anxiety—this of a lengthened kind; but there are no signs of poverty, far from it. The evidences around him are those of an absent, studious negligent man; but none of need. His collection of books, both in law, philosophy, and general history—for I looked round his study—is magnificent. Of his means nothing is known. The surgeon whom I met, and of whom I had previous knowledge, had very properly sealed up his keys upon being first called in. In the meanwhile, till his brother could arrive from Ireland, I offered his excellent nurse, Mrs. Roden, any needful means; but she declined, saying she had plenty. But tell me, who is this Mrs. Roden? She speaks of knowing you, and paints your character in warm and grateful words."

"I, Dr. Burnell, have my secrets as well as you. Authorship reveals many strange things, and Mrs. Roden's history it is my duty not to unfold. It is strange and sorrowful, rather than one of sin. She wrote to me, as many women write to me, thinking me all-potent to heal and save—I wish I were! But Janet's sorrows inexpressibly touched me: I sent for her; she came to see me, and when I had ascertained the truth of some of her statements, I set about doing what I could to save her from unmerited and bitter indigence. Fortunately at one friend's house, where I visit, I heard that the celebrated Ser-

jeant Greville needed a trustworthy house-keeper of Janet's years (that is forty). I took courage and wrote to him in her behalf—this with the less hesitation, as he had known my poor dead brother. The result was, that Janet went to him; her appearance of staid superiority greatly pleased him; so that in two or three days' time she was installed into the vacant place, at an excellent salary, with many privileges, and with liberty to keep a young servant to relieve her of all mere menial drudgery. She has now been with the Serjeant—who, when in town, lives always in chambers—some time, and has given the highest satisfaction, as he wrote to me only yesterday in reference to her—‘I have the best-cooked dinner, the neatest table, the most faultlessly clean chambers of any elderly bachelor in the inns of court. I must always be grateful to you for the possession of such an invaluable servant; and if she can be of any service to you during my prolonged absence from town, pray let her be so; a few days' usefulness for you, to whom she is so gratefully attached, will please her above all things.’ With permission such as this, you see, Doctor, I had less hesitation in calling upon her for a night's care of Mr. Fitzgerald. She is an excellent nurse, and I intend to write, by this night's post, to her kind master, stating the services she is rendering, and asking permission to extend them till the issues of life and death are seen.”

“You were quite right in your choice, dear

Miss Berkley," was the reply; "for no one can be more vigilant and tender than Mrs. Roden. But in order to save her from unwise fatigue, as she was up all last night, and has been on foot all to-day, I wrote whilst there, and sent the note by a porter for an excellent person I know of, at St. Bartholomew's. If she can attend—as most probably she can—you will see Mrs. Roden this evening. She can with safety leave, as the nurse is eminently trustworthy."

He now rose to go. Promising he would see Mr. Fitzgerald daily, as a friend, and not as a medical attendant—for a physician had been already summoned—he said, as he wished her good-bye, "You will not, I hope, dear Miss Berkley, let this matter between us be in abeyance longer than possible; and let the advantage be mine. If so, let the initiative come from you; it will be dearer to me for that very reason. I now usually dine with my mother at Richmond two or three times a-week (Tuesdays, Saturdays, and Sundays). Come down to us there, if your resolution be in my favour; my mother will welcome you with all a mother's love, for she tenderly regards you; and I, I shall think fortune and good and all things crowned then. Will you promise? You are too natural and genuine to have false scruples; will you promise?"

"I will," she faltered—"I will."

"Then God bless you," he said. "Till then, whether it be a day or a month, we will be simply friends. Now good-bye."

He would in his deep love have pressed her to his heart, and cried like a child in his profound joy. And she, too, would have fallen at his feet, and thanked him for this great submission of his intellect to her; but she restrained herself, knowing the joy that was yet to come, and only shook the hand that grasped hers, as though it would never loose its hold. A moment more and he was gone.

It was wearing late that evening—so late that little Ruth, greatly better, had brought in her mistress's usual supper of chocolate and toast, when Mrs. Roden came. She saw at once that Miss Berkley was greatly moved by her coming, and hastened to assure her that Mr. Fitzgerald was a shadow better, though yet delirious; that the excellent nurse procured by Dr. Burnell had arrived; that every comfort surrounded the poor patient; and that his only brother, being summoned by electric telegraph, would reach town most likely in a few hours.

"How the latter can ever repay you I do not know," said Janet, fixing her grateful gaze upon the pale face of her earnest listener. "For, as Mr. Brownlow justly says, had he been left half a dozen hours longer in the hands of his gin-drinking laundress and his worthless clerk, he would not have been alive at this hour. Since I have lived with Serjeant Greville I have seen a great deal of these laundresses, but nothing to equal this Mrs. Snaw. She seems never to have cleaned his chambers. His bed, as his clerk

admitted, was often never more than put straight for a month at a time, and the sheets never changed for three! And with things in this way, you can fancy the purloining of coals, tea, spirits, candles, and other things; for Mr. Fitzgerald, as his clerk tells me, is a very absent man."

"Dear William always was," said Alice; "once absorb him in the contents of a book, and all else in the world was forgotten."

"But it is impossible, dear lady, to conceive the extent of these oblivious habits, or the neglect of his old laundress. I found his gold watch in the cupboard with the crockery—his gold studs and chain in the knife-tray—his wig stuck in a dusty hole of the bookcase—his money here, there, and everywhere. I can scarcely describe to you the scene of ruin, dirt, and disorder."

Janet did not give expression to the thought; but as Alice sat there, bending down towards the fire—as though to hide tears which would not be hidden—the stern truth arose in her mind how much this ruin and neglect were deserved by one who would have so neglected and so misused a love like this, of this fond and tender woman—this woman who had loved him so long, so well, and so without return.

When Alice's tears dripped less fleetly through her fingers, Janet, lowering her voice and taking the lady's hand, said, "I have a secret to tell you."

Alice looked up inquiringly, and leant towards Janet.

"However warped his mind my have been by others—however incapable he may be of any profound or sterling love—however selfish and self-interested in preferring a miserable solitude, believe me he has loved you; and through later years this love has returned."

"Janet, you are jesting?"

"I am not, dear lady. Open this paper and the book within it, and see if I am a false prophet." She handed, as she spoke, a paper parcel she had laid beside her on the study table when she came in. Eagerly opening the paper, Alice beheld the identical volume of Bacon's works, out of which Mr. Fitzgerald used to read to her thirteen years before. The only mystery was how he had become possessed of the volume, as it had belonged to a set in the possession of her brother. She made inquiry of Janet.

"The same thought occurred to me," was the answer. "Being anxious about this book, for I heard he always slept with it under his pillow, and there I found it, I asked the clerk, and he said that his master had bought it, with many others, at the sale of the late Mr. Berkley, the barrister."

"Poor John!" And Alice remembered (as she only too well remembered) this other great shadow of her life.

But her fingers straying round the well-remembered book, lo! the leaves opened amidst the glorious aphorisms of the *Novum Organum*—those aphorisms in which lie the depths of human knowledge—those aphorisms from which the gain

of humanity will be exhaustless—those aphorisms which *he* (his arm twined round her) used, with consummate skill, to translate to her; she in that day thinking more of him than of knowledge, however high or all-embracing. The day had changed—necessity and solitude had made intellect at length (though not without a struggle) triumphant over mere passion of the senses. She loved William still, but intellect still more. For this reason she should prefer the hand of Dr. Burnell.

But, lo!—looking a little further—there lay within these well-remembered pages a lock of her hair (how far brighter it was then than now!) and a copy of Shelley's "Skylark" she had, with half childish fear, copied out for him. This last was worn and faded—worn and faded by foldings and unfoldings.

The book had lain night by night beneath his pillow, and was marked and worn by the heavy and continuous pressure of *his* head—his head she loved so well yet, yet, with all his sins, his indifference, his neglect. The old love was for the instant paramount above the new; it was such an entrancing thought to her, to think that she had been, might yet be beloved; she knelt and hid her beating heart and burning face in Janet's loving arms.

Far into the night they talked (for Janet stayed and shared Ruth's bed); but from her holier purpose—reverence to the dignity of the mind—Alice did not swerve.

Janet returned to her duties early next morning, and with her went the treasured volume.

For some days Alice saw nothing of Janet or Dr. Burnell, though receiving brief notes from the former. Mr. Fitzgerald was slightly better; his brother had arrived from Ireland; and Serjeant Greville, writing most kindly, gave Janet leave to continue her ministrations till his return. Honours and riches and profound learning had fructified the heart of this grand old man!

Eight days had now passed by. For two days she had heard nothing from Janet—nothing either from Dr. Burnell. She was wretched and unhappy. She could neither write nor read; her mind was in a chaos as great and fitful as the waves of ocean on a winter's night. Yet she must be patient—the issues of life and death were at stake, and it was not for *her* to intrude upon their sanctity; not for her, whose patience had already been so full of faith and deep religiousness!

It was about eight o'clock. Ruth, now well again, and pretty and blooming as a budding rose, had just cleared tea away, when a cab stayed in the square; a carriage rap came at the hall door; and Ruth brought up, a minute after, a card on the salver, on which was written—"Mr. Maurice Fitzgerald, Merrion-square, Dublin." Ruth was bidden to show him up; and a middle-aged gentleman presented himself. Briefly saying he was Mr. William Fitzgerald's brother, he took the chair Ruth placed for him before the fire, and sit-

ting down, regarded Alice with an interest that was not hidden by his grave demeanour. Alarmed by his manner, she asked falteringly after his brother—so falteringly that her words clove to her lips. She feared that he had come to break out the worst to her—that William was dead.

“No, no,” he replied gravely, “be at ease on these points. William is a shade better—indeed has been rational for the last eight-and-forty hours, and has been talking much with me; indeed it is for this reason that I am come to ask you a great and lasting favour—for my brother’s recovery, I am sorry to say, can only be temporary. But let me speak what ought to be my first words; how can we express our gratitude for your incomparable goodness?”

“I—I—I, sir, have shown but little; nothing more than I might have shown a stranger. I would have done more if I could; but——” She hesitated here, for she knew not how far she might proceed in thus speaking to a stranger.

“I know all,” he said, interrupting her, “from my brother’s lips; for our curiosity was excited to learn through whose agency a person of Mrs. Roden’s excellence stepped in, to be of such service to him in his first moments of danger. Questioning her, we have this day heard the truth from her lips, and how, through accident, you were made aware of his illness.”

“But—but, sir, this is nothing. Our religion consists in part of the Samaritanal office.”

“And of other practices as you so nobly inter-

pretate—of generosity to those who, as you thought, wanted; of charity to those who have injured you—deeply injured you—coldly repudiated you. I have already told you that William and I have been conversing of you to-day, and that Dr. Burnell, the skilfullest of physicians and the best of friends, has added to our information.”

Alice covered her face with her hands, and did not answer.

“But my duty here,” continued Mr. Fitzgerald, presently, “is to ask you to add to this list of obligations. My brother wishes to see you, to speak to you as well as he is able; will you therefore accompany me? I have come purposely, and hope you will. You, who have already shown so much noble forgiveness, will not hesitate, I think, to crown your good work.”

“Oh! no, sir,” replied Alice, instantly, as she rose from her chair and rung the bell for Ruth to assist her with her shawl and bonnet, “it will be painful to me; but if your brother desire it—if he be capable of it—if the interview be in any way a solace to him—I will go with you now.”

She waited for no reply; but, adjourning with Ruth to her bedroom, came quickly forth again, readily equipped for the brief journey, though the intense paleness of her face showed what the effort had cost her.

With much of William’s old manner, Mr. Maurice Fitzgerald took both her hands in his, as they were about leaving the room, and said fervently,

"May God bless you, dear lady, for this goodness!"

The cab in waiting soon conveyed them to Chancery-lane. Arm-in-arm they slowly ascended the dull staircase of the Rolls' Chambers, for the lights burnt but dimly in the close and foggy atmosphere. Past black and "sported" doors they went, the interiors left for the night to darkness and the figments of the law; past other doors "unsported," where men within were hard at work over "points of logic," "springs of human action," and the knotty entanglements of chicanery and barbarous legality—for laws, to be worthy of enlightened men, should be simple as a horn-book; past other doors where those within were resting from the labours of the day, or enjoying social companionship; past slip-shod laundresses, a little worse it might be for the day's unreckonable "sips;" past pot-boys, eating-house-boys, and so on, to the chambers of the sick barrister.

Good Janet opened the door to their low knock, and ushered them into the little hall, now bright and clean and dusted; thence into the sitting-room with its pleasant fire and orderly arrangement.

"Thank you, thank you," she said to Alice, as she pressed her hand beneath the warm enwrapping shawl; "the poor gentleman has been so thinking that you would not come. But I told him I knew you would."

"I will go in with you," spoke Maurice, in a low and anxious voice; "but will you object to remove your shawl and bonnet?—it will look to *him* perhaps

as though you came in the spirit of old friendship, not as a stranger."

She tacitly obeyed, for the spirit of a due obedience was so much hers in all things. So she stood in the exquisite neatness of her ordinary dress; the sign of the grave and great intellectuality of her character. But all else was forgotten now; she had but eyes and ears for him that had been the glory of her youth!

Preceding her a few paces, Mr. Maurice Fitzgerald went into the sick man's chamber, stepped back, and led her in; the nurse, sitting by the fire, retiring as he did so. The sick man was in bed, but, supported by pillows, rather sat than lay; and, for warmth, Janet had wrapped him in his old study gown. He was fearfully altered; much of his hair had been cut away; still there were the same large speaking eyes—the same look as of old. For a moment Alice hesitated how she should advance towards him; but when she saw his eager, anxious gaze, his outstretched hands—his whole aspect of expectancy—she went swiftly, stoopingly towards him, as a mother to her child, as a lapwing to its nest; and kneeling, was gathered in his arms!

For some minutes neither spoke—a low cry or moan was all that escaped the lips of the sick man. At length he raised his face, looked round with a sort of jealous fear to see that they were alone—which was the case—and then bent it down towards her again, as though afraid to meet her gaze. But hers was not a nature to reproach—

only to pity, to forgive, to be exactly just.

"My dear, my poor Alice," he at length said, "this is a comfort greater than any other earth could give me; and yet it is so undeserved. But please say that you will not reproach me, or I shall not have fortitude to speak. I deserve reproof, yet I ask for kindness."

"You shall have it, William; my only grief is, that I cannot raise you from this bed of sickness. But we must do all we can to effect this, to make you better; this must be my care, if you'll permit me. You know that we are very old friends, and that I deserve the privilege."

She looked up as she spoke, and in her face was not a shadow, though her eyes were dim with tears.

Taking courage, he too raised his face, and saw hers he had not seen so long; and its very expression of tenderness, kindness, and gentleness smote him more than anger would have done.

"So like the same," he said, as though to himself—"so very like the same, and yet so much exalted, and raised above her girlish manner and childish ways. All this I sacrificed, and threw as a jewel from me."

"Regrets are vain," she gently said; "but tell me one thing, William—did you ever love me?"

"I did; and do now more than all, living things."

"Then why neglect me?—why forget me? I loved you beyond all human expression, and yet

my winter and my desolation has been one of thirteen years."

"I must not extenuate what was really criminal and selfish in my own conduct; yet your sister-in-law and Miss E——, whose designs upon me were of a matrimonial kind, told me you did not love me, and were incapable of love; and that it would be folly in a needy man—as I was then—to marry a penniless girl. I listened to their advice; this the more readily, perhaps, that it chimed in with the selfish caution that is one of my strongest characteristics, and gave scope to what I esteemed was penetration into human motives. The power of analysis we derive from books may correctly define the mere common-place springs of action, but must never be used as an unvarying guide. I used it thus, and threw away priceless years of happiness."

He covered his face with his hands, and sobbed weakly—for he was very weak.

"Dear William, this grief is wrong in you. The past we cannot recall, but all of us may make a redemption in the present."

"*You* may, best and tenderest of creatures," he said; "but *I* cannot, for my days are numbered."

"Please do not speak thus, you will yet surely recover; and though my winter has been a sad and weary one, it may have been well and for the best. Recollect what one who knew all nature tells us—

‘That a divinity doth shape our ends,
Rough hew them how we may.’

We may thus have lost much, but gained more. Adversity has strengthened me—suffering purified me. Failing to be the mother of your children, I turned writer of books—such as they are. Do you know this?”

“Yes, yes; and learnt from them the treasure I had lost.” He drew her face towards his, and covered it with kisses. “I am no reader, as you well know,” he said, “of lighter, or rather, as I should say, modern literature; but I took up a magazine one day in a railway carriage, and saw your name. I cannot tell you with what emotion I read it, how the past lived before me again, and how the veil was torn from my eyes. On arriving at M—— (I was on my way to the assizes in that town), I inquired about you at one of the book-stalls in the station; and to my amazement I found that you were rapidly becoming one of the most popular writers of the day. I immediately bought such works as I could obtain, the rest when I returned to town; and from them learnt the worth of the genius I had so little stored. From that day to this my remorse has grown—lived with me constantly, till the just expiation of this death-bed has come.” She was going to speak, but he softly bid her “hush!”—he must, whilst he could, say what he had to say. “This night, dearest,” he said in a little while, “is the last time we may rightly discuss this subject. You must be the wife of another—of a man worthy of you—of a man to whom even your high intellect may look up. See, I know your

secret, and will unselfishly minister to your happiness, only asking you to be to me a sister and a friend."

Alice looked up with intense surprise into his face, and the blood mantled to her hair.

"William," she said falteringly, "if you really love me, if you are in poverty, if likely to live through a long time of sickness, I will marry you—it will be my duty."

"But you have a higher duty, precious creature—a duty to your own noble intellect—which became your stay in the bitter hour I so basely requited you. From Mrs. Roden I gathered somewhat of an idea that Burnell loved you—from himself more; it was manner, not words: you see I am an interpreter of others' thoughts, as I always was. Now tell me the truth; this is a solemn hour, and you must speak to me as to your own heart, though it is a concession I scarcely deserve."

She did not look up into his face, but with bent head went onward speaking, as he desired—

"William, I loved you better than my own life. The very resolve I made to nobly prove that I was better than you thought me, is in itself a test of the depth and strength of my love. With you will live and die all that was the glory of my young life—nothing like it I can ever know again. But out of those very intellectual resources upon which I was cast, not only for consolation but for bread, other wants and necessities have now arisen. The very sternness and resolve with

which I have had to fight my way—the very duty and submission with which I have had to bow to necessity and toil, have, in their turn, begot needs and wants of their own. I am more austere, more ambitious, more inflexible of purpose than when you knew me years ago. In a word, *duty* is a more absorbing passion to me than that of love ; or rather, I should say, I prefer love that would grow out of duty, rather than love for itself. In respect to Dr. Burnell, you have guessed truly : within the past fortnight—even since you lay sick here—he has made me the splendid offer of his hand and fortune ; and my acceptance yet rests in abeyance, purposely for *your* sake. For a long time, he confesses, he has thought of me, for a long time loved me, and forgotten throughout that I get my bread by daily toil, am not very young, have no fortune to offer him. Yet in spite of these things he has asked me to be his. Words cannot express to you my appreciation of his noble act, of his disinterestedness, his perfect truth. If I marry him, I shall minister to all the lofty hopes and aspirations which have made me what I am—which constitute me as I am—are my being *now*. With him I shall be perfectly happy, for love will grow out of the very reverence with which he inspires me. This is the truth, William. But if you are poor, William, if it will add to your life and happiness, I will marry you ; for time would perhaps heal old wounds, and give back the sunshine of my youth. But whichever way your

choice is, I shall love you as long as I have breath."

He thanked her earnestly many times over, and his tears mingled with hers.

In broken sentences, as ability permitted, he told her, that so far from being an impoverished man, he had amassed money, even in spite of the peculations of his laundress and clerk, to which his eyes had been latterly opening; that he could not finally recover from his illness, as it was partly disease of the lungs of old standing; that he might last till the autumn, but not longer; and that he had but one fervent hope in life—it was that she would in some portion nurse him and close his eyes.

"So far, my dearest," he said, "from being jealous, or thinking wrongly of your preference, it is what I both desire and appreciate. It will be the best of consolations to me, to see you married before I go—to know that you have a protector and a husband, and have taken farewell of the pecuniary trials incident to bread so hardly earned as that of literature."

He then asked her further concerning Dr. Burnell, and when an answer to his wishes was required. She frankly told him.

"Then go to-morrow evening—by all means go — there can be no place so fitting for this explanation as his mother's house. Go! you will promise me?"

She promised—though there was a degree of sadness and reluctance in her tone. He then

drew the volume of the "Novum Organum" from beneath his pillow, where he had searched for, and bid them put it, when he recovered from his delirium, and showed it her, not thinking she had seen it. "Through this," he said, "I will live in the past. If I get a little better we will read it together once more. Now give me one embrace; it must be our last of earthly love—for to-morrow you will be, and rightly, another's—unless, in my dying hour, one pure caress shall lend me faith, and give me strength to die."

Like sisters, or like friends upon a sinking wreck, they took their last farewell of earthly love. When William unwound his arms, Alice was insensible; the victory of duty and intellectual love had not been won lightly or unpainfully!

Through the care of Janet she was in a little while restored. She then returned to William's room, and sat by him some time. Then she prepared to go. As she bid William good-bye for the night, his last words were, "Remember, you go to Richmond to-morrow night, and the next day, with Dr. Burnell's leave, come and see me."

As Mr. Maurice Fitzgerald escorted her downstairs to the cab they met Mrs. Snew, rather the worse for countless tastes and sips. She stopped them short, and addressed Alice, whom she recognized:

"So you went and told 'em as what I says in Mr. Blueball's shop, did you?" she said, with great emphasis on the personal pronoun; "and all

about the nussin', and the chops, and the tripe, and so loses me the work; and my dear, dear kind master, Mr. Fitzgerald, as was so uncommon good to me, and feelin', and had no keys to nothin'; and never minded a small drain o' brandy when spasms was a-frettin' me. Not only that—such a dear nice master as he was; but I've lost four of my five other fires, and I don't know how many pur o' boots—and this through you." Mr. Maurice giving Alice a sign to make no answer, they passed on in silence. Failing thus in the pathetic, Mrs. Snew took to more intemperate language; and when they were out of sight, sat down in a corner of the staircase and comforted herself with more sips from a secret bottle, which, by the way, seems to be the necessary appendage of a laundress's pocket.

On the following afternoon Alice set out on her way to Richmond. It was growing dusk when she got there, rapid as had been her transit by railway and cab. But the cheerful lights from the rustic villa, and the forerunning glimpses of the moon, as they fell on the glorious river and adjacent garden, gave an air of pleasant welcome to the scene.

Mrs. Burnell received her expected visitor with unaffected pleasure.

"It is lucky, my dear," she said, as she led Alice to her own room to take off her wrappers, "that I have not dined. We will therefore have dinner immediately, tête-à-tête, and then adjourn to the drawing-room, where Richard can find us;

for he dines in town to-day, and will not be here before eight o'clock."

They therefore dined, the good old lady making no allusion to the subject of Alice's visit, though betraying it by the affectionate warmth of her manner, and her repeated expression—"I am so glad, my dear, that you are come!"

The pleasant meal over, they went into the drawing-room, where a bright wood-fire shed light and warmth around the hearth, there being no other light of lamp or candles. The room itself looked out by several windows on to a lawn and the adjacent river; more particularly by a deep bay window of large dimensions, that opened out upon the closely-shaven sward. From this could be seen the river, in majestic beauty, a wide sweep of grass and trees, a simple little summer-house of wood (covered in summer with wood-bines), and just such a one as Stothard loved to place in his exquisite vignettes. Over this lovely scene the flooding moonlight lay, and sweeping through the oriel panes, fell far within the room, till firelight and moonlight blended into one. Within this scene of comfort and repose the ladies sat.

As the evening wore away, the gate-bell rung, and with the exclamation "There is Richard!" the good old lady hurried from the room.

For the past week the doctor's first exclamation had been, when his mother's carriage brought him to the door from the railway-station, "Are there any visitors?" The answer had

hitherto been negative — to-night it was affirmative :

“ Who ? ”

“ Miss Berkley, sir, from town.”

His fear and pain were past now ! His joy—the greatest he had ever known !

Further questions were stayed by the appearance of his good, fond mother, who, leading him into the adjacent dining-room, whispered, “ She is come. She looks pale—nay almost ill ; but very happy ! Go up to her ; she is above, in the drawing-room. I will stay and have tea here for this evening. You can bring her down.”

He did not stay to hear another word, only for an instant in the hall, to pull off his hat and outer coat. In a moment more he had opened and closed the drawing-room door.

She rose up to meet him, went a step—though but a step—for she was folded in his arms.

“ So good—so kind—so full of truth ! ” he said ; and not freeing herself from his arms, he knew she was his.

“ And now come and sit down, and tell me all about yesterday,” he added, when the wildness of his deep masculine joy was a little stayed. “ I knew, from what our poor patient said, he was going to behave nobly to you. He could but do so, after your own incomparable goodness.”

He sat down in a low prie-dieu chair that was his mother's ; and then, in a way that was all her own, for its grace and nature, she went and knelt

beside him, her face drawn to his, his arm around her, and told him truthfully what had passed between her and Fitzgerald.

"He gave me up, dear Richard, and——"

"And you are mine!" he interrupted. "Are you happy?"

"Very, very!—my Winter is past, beloved, and my Spring is come."

"Summer, you would say. It is the first summer of the soul *I* have ever known."

So, for a long time, they talked; an hour counting as a minute.

By-and-bye he rose, and drew her to the deep bay window, there to behold the glorious scene, though they still chiefly talked of Fitzgerald. "One favour, dearest, you will grant, I hope, in reference to him," Alice said. "You will be too noble-minded, I am sure, to doubt me!"

"What is it?"

"That I may nurse William; may go to and fro to see him."

"I have such perfect faith in your purity and goodness that I desire you should do so. Indeed, I have even thought of this; and as his brother and myself have already arranged that a lodging be taken for him at St. John's Wood, or Hampstead, where he can have better air and larger comfort, you will have every facility. You shall read to him, visit him, have my entire sanction to be both sister and friend."

The way in which she cleaved to him and

thanked him told him how she appreciated this generous liberty.

"Now," he said, "*I* have a favour to ask in return."

"What is it?"

"That we may be married in May; this is January. That will be long enough to wait."

She made no answer, beyond pleading that that was very soon.

"Not soon enough. We will spend our honeymoon somewhere in Devonshire, and letting Fitzgerald follow us, nurse him in some lovely spot."

"This might be cruel kindness, Richard."

"Not a whit of it, dear one. He has resigned you to me, and the natural contingencies cannot be cruel."

Thus they talked, when Richard's mother came in. Without a word he placed them in one another's arms, and his mother knew that she had a daughter. She was very happy, for she had long known and loved Alice Berkley, and Alice her. They went down to tea; and an evening was passed such as belonged to that spring which was at hand—I might say come.

As soon as his condition permitted, Mr. Fitzgerald was removed to a pleasant lodging at Hampstead, and an elderly woman hired to attend him as nurse and servant. There was no chance of his recovery, for his disease was that of the lungs; but some days he rallied wonder-

fully—others drooped. As her time permitted, Alice went to see him; carrying with her books and papers, and remaining hours to read or to walk beside his wheel-chair, as it was drawn up and down the turfy slopes of the heath. Sometimes Mrs. Roden went out for a day or two, to nurse him; and amongst occasional visitors were Mrs. Burnell and fine old Serjeant Greville.

Alice and William were now no more than friends—but friends whose pure and divine spirit of friendship augmented day by day. They read together, talked together, and to his fine taste—antiquarian, legal, and philosophical—she was again a scholar.

For May the wedding was fixed; and, simple as it was intended to be, more preparations were made for it than Alice knew of. Mrs. Leeson's two daughters, who were both governesses in families, got leave of absence; and her only son too, who was apprentice to a surgeon at Reading. They loved Miss Berkley; she had been so daughter-like, and so true a friend to their mother.

It has always struck me that what people call "grand weddings" are very vulgar and irreverent affairs. They serve to display wealth, at the cost of all the more delicate and tender sentiments which should consecrate marriage. Alice had no taste of this sort, and her own preparations were of the simplest kind. A plain dress to go to church in, a richer one for travelling, a

hospitable breakfast set forth with a little more than ordinary formality, were all her own preparation. But others were not forgotten—neither Ruth nor Janet, nor Mrs. Leeson or her daughters.

The true festival was in her own soul. There was it kept and sanctified; there was Winter changed for ever into Spring. Duty had superseded love, and a higher and holier love had already arisen upon this sure foundation; for whatever intellect enriches, that it hallows. The night before her marriage, when the devoutness of her gratitude was at its full, she knelt and blessed God that He had given her strength to endure and triumph over many evil things and many temptations; that He had given her faith to see that light shines out of darkness—that all winters have their springs; that whatever *is*, is always for the best; and that He, through His holy shadow and care, had brought her to this hour with stainless feet, and with a conscience that had no regrets!

It was a glorious May morning when she rose. Her toilet-table had been secretly decked with lovely flowers, which she now beheld, and their accompaniment of many presents—a magnificent bracelet from Serjeant Greville, a simple brooch from Janet, a veil of Honiton lace from Mrs. Burnell, and a fine copy of Milton's works from Mr. Maurice Fitzgerald. There were also presents of their own beautiful work from Mrs. Leeson's daughters. But the most touching

gift was one from William Fitzgerald — the diamond-ring he had worn many years, and in the back of which was now inserted a cipher formed by his own and her hair, the engraved initials of their names, and under these, in Latin, “Fragrant and Eternal.”

She went downstairs, and took a preparatory breakfast with Mrs Leeson. Not long after, two carriages came to the door, without favours or without ostentation. The one Serjeant Greville’s, the other Dr. Burnell’s. She went in the former to a church hard by, was married, came home with her husband, and all breakfasted; Mrs. Burnell and Mr. Maurice Fitzgerald, who had come purposely from Ireland (whither he had some time returned), being amongst the number.

Then she dressed and prepared to go away with her husband to the beautiful cottage which had been hired and prepared for them amongst the lovely scenery of Devonshire. But they had a solemn visit to pay before starting—it was to Hampstead; for their promise to do so had been given to Mr. Fitzgerald. They found him unusually weak, but cheerful and resigned. Alice thanked him, with grateful tears, for his gift, and showed him how, by her husband’s desire, she had placed it beneath her wedding-ring.

“You see I am not jealous,” said the good physician, with a smile, “though my little wife and you are such good friends. So far from this, she shall be a better nurse to you than

ever. A week hence we shall expect you down in Devonshire. Janet is to travel with you, and you shall have a hearty welcome, do not fear."

Mr. Fitzgerald smiled faintly, and drew from the pillow on which his head rested a small parchment. Begging their attention, he slowly read it: it was his will. To their surprise—painful surprise—they found that he had divided his property between his brother and Alice, and bequeathed in addition, to the latter, his library of books. Dr. Burnell at once protested that Alice did not need money; that his fortune was large, that every wish and want of hers would be lavishly anticipated by a love that had never been exceeded for depth and earnestness.

"But I have a reparation to make, Doctor," was the reply, "and I must make it. Alice knew years of need, that my selfishness, my coldness, my circumspection inflicted; it is to these years that any possible expiation of mine points. Please let her have the money; it will do for her children—a boy if she has one, which you can name after me. It does not rob my brother, for he is a man of property. The books Alice must have, for Maurice has little literary taste, and no hand so much as hers will touch them reverently. Now, I have but one thing more to ask. Will you grant it?"

"What is it?"

"That you will let your wife close my eyes."

"She shall, she shall!—and will with the spirit and tenderness of an angel."

"Of that I am sure. Now go. It is her wedding-day, she should be happy."

The Doctor, deeply moved, led his wife weeping from the room; but hers were tears that rather sanctified this richest festival of her life, just as a passing shower lends beauty to the glory of a summer's noon! In an hour they were on their journey, and these tears were dry.

The cottage chosen for them in Devonshire was in a sequestered spot near the sea, and backed by scenery of the most exquisite description. Brooks, undulating thymy downs, breadth of woods and pastoral fields, made it worthy of a poet's song, and fitting as a place where the few summer days of human life might be passed in a sunshine of their own. A lawn sloped towards the sea and the white sands of the beach, stretching away for miles, fringed the verdure of the sward.

Here it was that Alice and her husband passed the first week of their married life. At its close the poor invalid came, attended by his brother, Janet, and little Ruth. For some few days he rallied, and, lying outdoors on a couch, enjoyed the warmth of the sunshine, the freshness of the air, the scent of the early flowers, the murmur of the waves. Then a change came, and he drooped more rapidly than ever, and could no longer be carried forth abroad.

One day, when Alice had been reading to him out of that Great Book which gives to us the Divine promise of our future life, he asked her to kneel down beside him and pray. She did so,

and when she had ended, he bid her come nearer, and a little nearer. She did so, and, remembering her promise, pressed down her pure lips upon his, and doing so received his dying breath. Raising her tender hands, she closed his eyes, and her duty to the dead was well accomplished. Her husband coming in, she arose. It was *he* that dried her tears. Her Winter was over—her Spring was come!

We all of us have Winter in our lives; but let us hope, and wait, and patiently bear onward—the Spring will surely come!

* * * * *

At night again Lucy resumes her solitary and solemn vigil—for, as she truly says, she prefers to watch alone. Whose hand can be so tender, whose ear more watchful, who so anticipative of every need? None! for if the claims of kindred be outwardly ignored, at least there are within impulses and affinities which reach from soul to soul, and touch each other by links and invisible surfaces, of which we know nothing more, than that there is action and re-action, and that there are times when they act irrespective of our wills. So within the very shadows of the grave there is this night a recognition—a claim of kin—a sympathy, which has no voice!

All through the night she has patiently watched and tended, and now the day begins to break—that cold gray dawn, which is so undertoned and sad. Lucy has bent her head, and dropped into

a doze, so that she sees not that sense in her she watches has fitfully returned, and that a gaze is on her, which is awful in its intentness. At last the shadowy hand is put forth to touch the pillow, and then her.

"Lucy! I'm glad you've come," is said in a voice so faint as to be scarcely audible.

In an instant Lucy has taken the shadowy hand, and is bending over her mother.

"I've been here some hours, mamma. I am glad if my presence comforts you."

"Yes; I told them to send for you. I had a sense my child was by me. I—I—I have made my will——"

"Don't let us talk of wills, mamma, but of the comfort of being together in this hour."

"I have made my will," she gasps, as though incapable of understanding Lucy's words, "I've made my will, and all is yours. The boys behaved badly to me. Here's twenty-five sovereigns in the pincushion, take care of them, my dear, and the silver spoons, and my silk dresses, and ——"

"Mother, would you like to be buried in my father's grave?"

"The pincushion, my dear, take care of it. Don't let the woman have my new print dress ——"

"Mother, am I a comfort to you?"

"Put your face closer, Lucy, mine is cold, my dear. The pincushion—the pin——"

This is all! The ruling passion strong in death.

The world, and all things worldly, even on the threshold of the Eternal Door!

"Oh! mother—mother!" weeps Lucy, as she kisses the face of the dead; "would you had said you loved me, it would have been worth all you have pinched to save!"

Ah! that one word Love, how it governs us from the cradle to the grave!

On this warm and vernal morning, whilst a funeral goes forth from Shirlot to a picturesque old church-yard amidst the hills, a young woman comes a few miles by railway from an adjacent county, and, after a brief walk, turns off from the highway through a gate into a lane striking deep into woodlands; for one side is a sea of young plantations, on the other a great breadth of ancient forest. She has a brisk step, is eager-eyed as to the way before her, and is laden with a bundle, a basket, and small parcels. When she stops to rest, which she does sometimes, for the lane is long, she has no sight for what is around her. By her the wayside flowers, the wayside springs, the vividness of the forest tints, are all unrecognized; her glances only go before her on the road she has to tread, or if they rest upon immediate space, it is upon her basket, the lid of which she occasionally opens to look within at certain little garments resting there—exclaiming, as she does so, "My Sam, my little Sam!"

A bend in the forest road brings at length a cottage in sight, where children play before the

door, or in the sweeping shadows of the adjacent trees; a cow grazes on the wide belt of sward opposite the door, and a busy world of pecking hens and their scarcely fledged broods make this picture of life amidst the solitary woods complete.

The eldest of these children is a lusty boy of about seven years old, who, trundling a younger one in a wheelbarrow, does not see the quick-footed stranger approach, and only becomes conscious of her presence as she stays him and his wheelbarrow, and folds him in her arms.

"My dear Sam—my little Sam—mother has got a holiday and has come to see her dear boy. She has brought him his new clothes, and he is to go with her this afternoon to Shirlot."

Sam, who occasionally wonders why he has two mothers, one whom he always lives with, and another who comes occasionally to see him, and who is always showing her love in some way or another, after undergoing a considerable amount of endearment, gets free and rushes off into the cottage—calling out, as he does so,

"Mother—here's mother Rhoda come!"

In an instant Mrs. Ray, with a baby in her arms, appears upon the threshold, and greets, with great love and warmth, the young woman.

"I'm glad you're come, my dear. It's always a great treat to me and master to see thee. Mr. and Mrs. Quatford drove up here a few days since, and said we might expect thee. So I got a bed ready, to show thee I was prepared whenever thou might come."

"Thank you, Susan, I and my child can never be grateful enough to you. But Mrs. Quatford had, I believe, asked for a holiday for me; and last evening when a letter came to say Miss Eden was at Shirlot, my mistress said I had better take a week's leave at once. So I started this morning. It was well I had little Sam's things ready to bring—but he's never forgotten, as you know, Susan."

"Never; but then the boy deserves it—a better little fellow mother never owned. My master and I shall never have a child we love more than Sam."

"You've both shown it. But you won't be hurt, Susan, at our running away through the afternoon. Mrs. Quatford wrote word, I was to go to the parsonage, and take Sam with me."

Whilst the women have been thus talking the child has been about upstairs; and now returning, interrupts his foster-mother's reply, by pushing a gay-coloured book into Rhoda's hand.

"See—see!" he says, "what the man in the lane gave me."

The women exchange glances, but make no comment, though Susan can see the intense pallor which instantly overspreads Rhoda's face.

"Come, Sam," she says, interfering, "thy mother has brought thee a cake, I daresay. So take it, and run out to the other children till dinner's ready."

"I've brought them all cakes and toys, Susan,"

replies Rhoda; "for I can make no difference between yours and my own little one, only you see when my eyes first fall on little Sam my heart forgets all else. But here they are!—let me make their hearts happy!" So Rhoda takes her parcels and goes out into the sweet sunlight before the door, and divides doll and tea-things, and whistle, and box of soldiers, between the little company. Then she and Susan return to the house.

"Didn't you say that Mrs. Quatford had been writing to your mistress, and that you do not know what is her business with you this afternoon?"

"Yes; but my mistress and the dear lady are great friends, so they may have many things to write about."

"That's true—but there's something in the matter, as I think you'll find. *He's* been going on very steady a long time, and only last night my master told me that Mr. Quatford has let him the Glebe Farm, and that he went in at Lady-day. His mother too is dead, and there's a little bit of money, and some household goods, though his sisters, I believe, have got the biggest share." Susan pauses here, hoping Rhoda will reply, but she is silent. "I think, Rhoda," continues the good friend, "as things be thus I wouldn't stand out hard and cold against him any longer. If ever man seemed penitent he does, and all the wide world has no home so fitting for thee as his houseplace."

"I know it, Susan," she answers, as she bends

her face still more towards the shadow of her hands, "but girls and women think of the same thing differently. I was but sixteen years and a month old when my little Sam was born—I am three-and-twenty now. I therefore see all the wrong he did me, all the disgrace he brought upon me, as they rightly stand in the eyes of the world. Susan, if you had suffered as I suffered, you would be hard too."

"Perhaps so. But, as he has often told my master, they had kept him in drink till he had married that woman. Besides this, Rhoda, you've never let him speak for himself, or——"

"No; I have never exchanged words with him since that night we parted in the barn, and I left Shirlot. But let us say no more about this matter; it is talking of old sorrows to no good end, for I'm come out to enjoy my holiday, not to mar it."

Susan is wise—she does not press the point further, she has a feeling that all will yet come right; so she hastens to get dinner, whilst her guest, taking the baby, goes forth to the happy children outside.

The woodman welcomed home, the dinner over, afternoon come, little Sam is dressed in his new clothes and hat, and boots, and everything, till, as Susan says, he looks like a "lord's son," and he and his mother set out on their way to Shirlot. It is a great treat to him to go, he has always a bright shilling given to him at the parsonage, and the dear old ladies at the Hall are sure

to have barley-sugar or pennies in their pockets, or apples in their cupboard. His only trouble is that he cannot take his little friends, but his mother tells him they shall go some other time.

Running on before her, blowing a whistle she brought him, the child comes back, as they near a white gate, and sedately takes her hand. Then, after gazing wistfully up into her face, he says,

"Mother, this is the gate where I so often see the man!"

"Is it, dear?"

"Yes; but why do you turn so white in your face when I speak of him?"

"Because it vexes me."

"Why?—he's very good to me."

"He ought to be—he is your father."

"Father! Is he, mother? Then why doesn't he live with you, like father with mother at home?"

"Because, dear, he behaved badly to me."

"Did he? Then I'll never like him any more, or take what he gives me."

"You must, child, he is your father, and you must learn to love him!"

To this the little fellow makes no reply, but holding his mother tightly by the hand, gazes every now and then up still wistfully into her face.

"Mother," he says again presently, "please to tell me about this man's badness."

"I cannot, my dear; he is good to you, and

that is sufficient. Let us talk of something else."

But the boy keeps silence, still holds her by the hand; and even when they turn aside into some fields to shorten the way, he still keeps beside her with a grave step.

The fields wind downwards to the river, and as she stoops to help him across the ford he puts his arms about her neck, and says, in the sweet whisper of childhood,

"Kiss me, mother! Though the man was bad to you, little Sam loves you!"

Her heart has been greatly moved already; the love of her child is the passion of her soul, the exquisite tenderness of his words overcomes all self-resolve, she folds him in her arms, she crouches down upon the mossy bank, and she gives way to the passionate tears of sorrow and love. She is alone, there is no one to behold the intensity of her maternal love, or to guess her long remembrance of wrong.

But there is, and one who has been waiting for her all this day. The child's ear, quicker than her own, is the first to detect approaching steps; freeing himself, and looking up, he cries, "Mother, here's the man!"

She strives to rise, but a strong hand detains her.

"Rhoda," says Samuel, for he it is, "you have been sent for purposely to speak to me, and you must. I have been waiting for you hereabouts since morn, but I missed you, by your crossing this way. Rhoda, Mr. and Mrs. Quatford know

that I've come to speak to you, as you'd neither listen to messages, nor read letters, nor see me, the twice I travelled to where you live. Rhoda, you must forgive me!—you must come home—I've got a place ready—I want you, and my child!"

For the first time she raises her face, and looks steadily into his. The heart of the man is newly touched by her exceeding beauty—Rhoda is more lovely than of old.

"Mr. Clayton, you forget the ruin and misery you brought upon me. You forget that you were faithless. I can work and keep my child, so let us be apart."

"Rhoda, listen for once. If ever man repented of a great sin, I do mine. If baring my heart would show you my deep love, and my sorrow for the past, I would bare it. To try to win thee I've given up my sopping, as Mr. Quatford knows, and I've worked and saved to get a decent home once more. Come to it—it is thy place and the child's."

"I would rather not—I would rather not talk any more. All the grief of my girlhood is born afresh."

Again he talks to her—again he appeals—he would take her hand—but she draws off quickly from his touch.

"Let me go, if you please—you're keeping me."

"Not yet, Sam—ask your mother to put her hand in mine—it is its right place."

"No! you were bad to mother."

"I was, I know—but I am very, very sorry. Do ask your mother to forgive me—father asks you."

The child begins to have an intuitive perception that he should be mediator between the mother who is so tender to him, and the man she has told him he must love ; so presently he puts down his face to her and says,

"Mother, be good to the man—he is so sorry !"

He does more than whisper—presently he puts his arms around the necks of both, drawing them together till their faces meet. The father's passionate caresses, the mother's tears, melt into each other. The child of both brings together once again those so long divided.

An hour after, when they enter the Rectory together, the child between them, Mrs. Quatford joins their hands.

"This is well," she says ; "little Sam must come home, and his mother with him."

Three weeks after this there is a wedding, at which, amongst others, Miss Eden and Selina are present. An hour after it has taken place Rhoda and Selina go hand-in-hand together to the Hall. It is the day of gathering for the aged gentlewomen, and prayers are just over. Rhoda takes her place on the well-remembered form. She left the Hall dishonoured—she returns to it with purified feet.

The dear ladies gather round her, and give the

young wife their benediction. For conflict with the world has taught the nobler portion of them the charities which dignify us on this mortal scene.

Dear Shirlot, may your oaks outlive a thousand years! Your glowing hearths shut out the frosts of countless winters!

Peace be to the memory of Lady Catherine Herbert! To her Gentlewomen farewell!

THE END.

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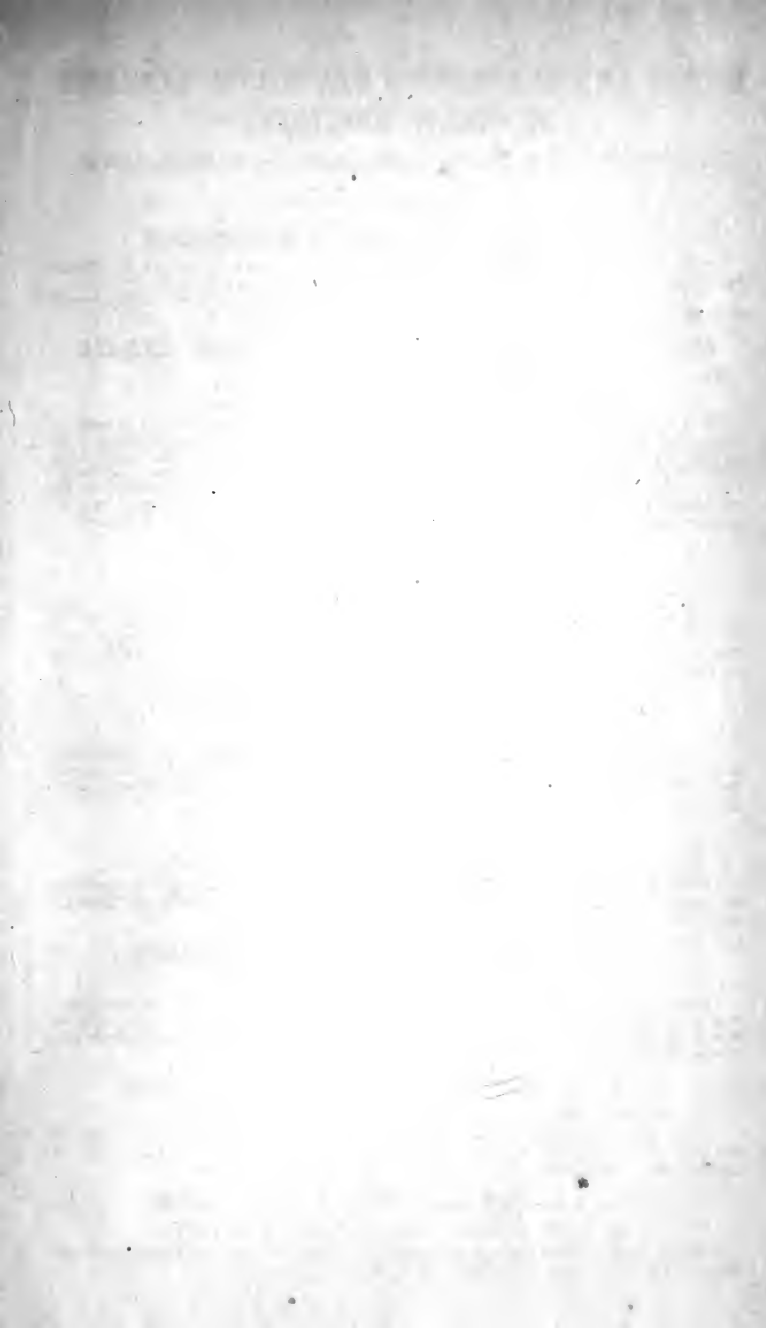
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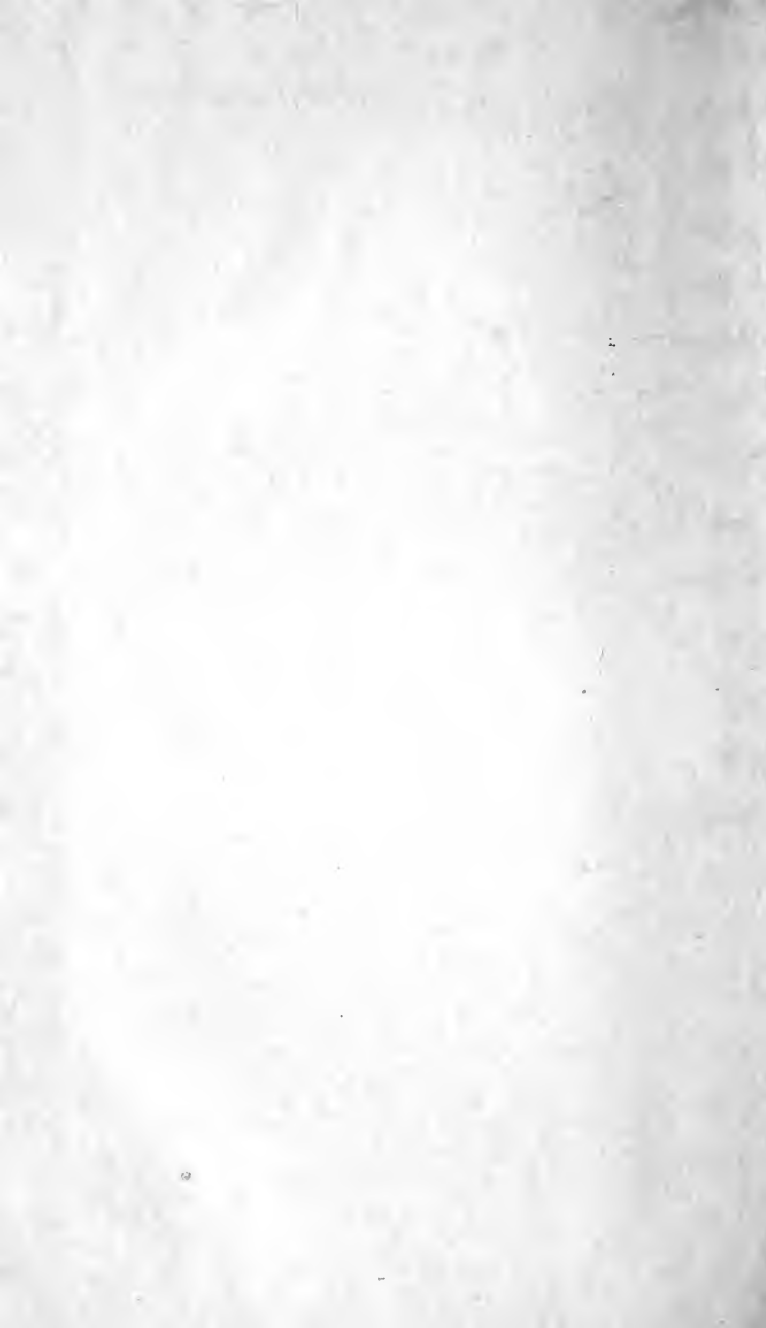
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